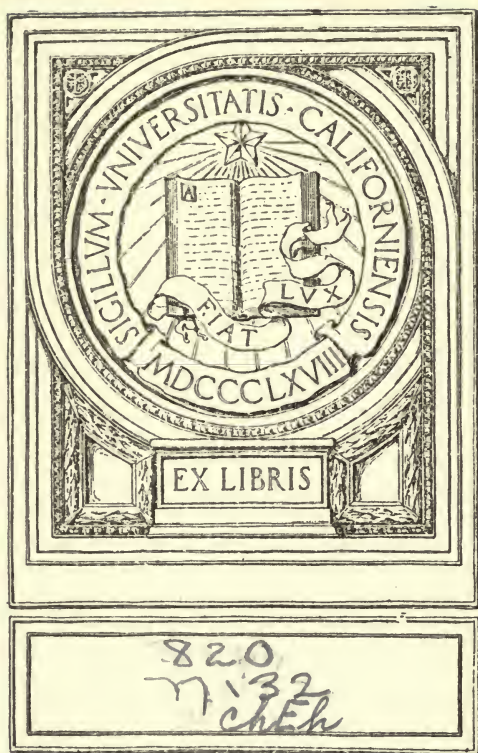


The
FLYING POILU
MARCEL NADAUD



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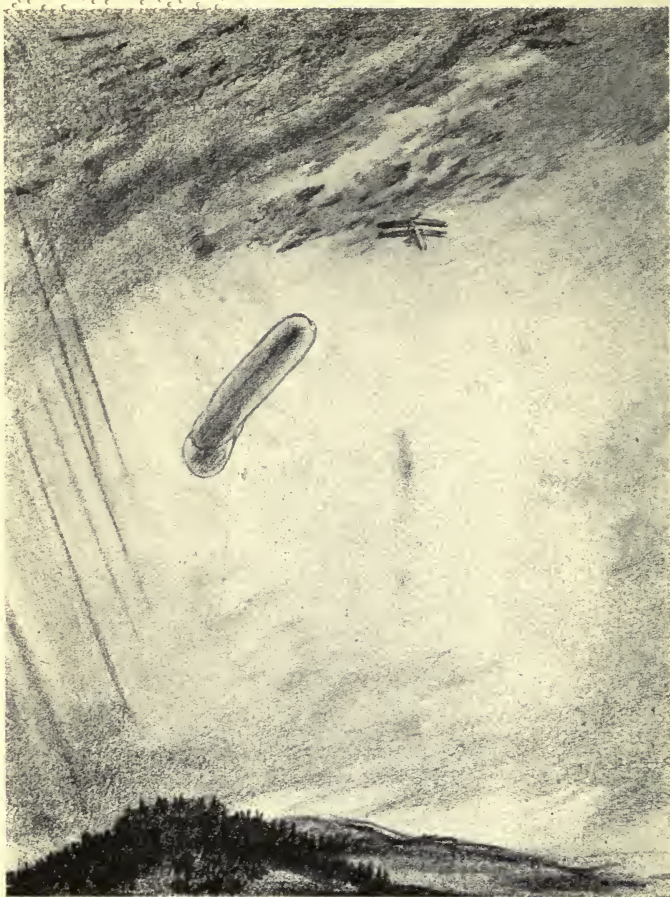
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FOR REVIEW

THE FLYING POILU



Chignole gets a sausage

Frontispiece

THE FLYING POILU

A STORY OF AERIAL WARFARE

BY

MARCEL NADAUD

OBSERVER-BOMBARDER IN THE FRENCH AVIATION CORPS

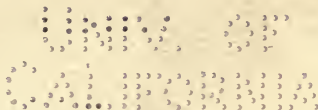
TRANSLATED BY

FRANCES WILSON HUARD

AUTHOR OF

"MY HOME IN THE FIELD OF HONOUR" AND
"MY HOME IN THE FIELD OF MERCY"

WITH DRAWINGS BY CHARLES HUARD



HODDER AND STOUGHTON

LONDON NEW YORK TORONTO

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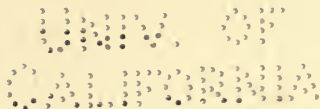
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CHAPTER I

CHIGNOLE INTRODUCES HIMSELF

Down in the garden beside a pond of still water I was profoundly busy feeding the heedless carp.

From time to time their noses came to a level with the surface, shimmering in the noon-day sun. Each protrusion caused a slight shiver to cross the imperturbable sheet of water, and a thousand little ripples spread out towards the edges, caressing, just before disappearing, the trembling weeds.

Little by little I was coming back to life, and in my resurrection I felt the delight of a child. It seemed as though I had experienced the complete re-education of my senses.

The aspect of things about which I was most completely blasé, at present seemed entirely new, and I discovered the world with astonished eyes.

Oh, the joy of feeling oneself alive again ! of feeling one's human machine working nor-

fully without a hitch : the comfort of knowing that suffering is a thing of the past ; the pleasure of breathing freely without apprehension, the delight in being happy because one has regained one's appetite, one's sleep, one's health !

Finished those bitter hours in the hospital, long as an interminable grey day when the rain patters ceaselessly against the window panes ; finished the hours of feeling one's self a useless being ! impotent, a pale empty form, just like so many others that surround one. I am going back to the front. I am well again.

My canteen was already in my room, and it was not without emotion that I contemplated my working clothes, worn, soiled and resplendent with patches.

" Hello there, old fellows, comrades in my misery and misfortune, and also in my little bit of glory. Old worn-out clothes, shiny on every seam, castaways of yesterday's raids, you who have known my enthusiasm and my fears, with what joy shall I now don you. For you personify the past regained, life up there, battle in the air, the swishing of a wing. Hello there, old fellow ! greetings to you."

Along the pathway I heard hurried steps advancing, then a well known familiar cry,

sonorous as a trumpet, joyous as a cock-crow, greeted my ears.

“ Hip-hip ! ”

“ Hip-hip ! ” I answered.

Chignole was patting me on the back. Chignole in person, Chignole who left Nancy that morning with a six-day leave of absence, and who could not think of coming to Paris without hurrying out top speed to shake hands with his “ Boss.”

“ Well, little one ? How is it coming on ? Are you getting on top again ? Gee ! what a hospital ! a château ! a palace ! flowers, all the water you want, lawns out of sight and rocking-chairs ! You can’t feel a bit like a workman in such furniture. I should think you’d get nervous as a sponge or a dish of noodles when you are in one of those things.”

Chignole was my head mechanician. He is twenty, born in Paris, and hails from Montmartre, naturally ! His childhood was spent between the Place Blanche and the Place du Terte : the rue Lepic and the rue des Saules bear witness of his miraculous sliding propensities, in which the seat of more than one pair of trousers was nobly sacrificed, and Poulbot, the artist, assuredly used him for a model when originating his first drawings of children.

From his acquaintance with "The Butte Sacrée" he had retained a picturesque vocabulary, and a most savoury accent. His philosophy could be resumed in the one all-powerful maxim, "I should worry," and his good humour was most appreciably even.

On his bench in a free school the sports haunted his imagination. In his dreams he fancied himself champion of the pedal, succumbing beneath the ovations accorded a shining light in the Vélodrome d'Hiver." But his father having had the bad taste to die while he was still practically in swaddling clothes, and his mother, a humble worker in a factory, being unable to buy him a bicycle, he entered as apprentice the shop of a lock maker who at the same time rented and repaired the coveted machines.

In course of time motors killed bicycling and Chignole, a progressive youngster, followed the move.

He found a job with a constructor of automobiles at Puteau, and slowly but surely climbed the ladder which leads from apprenticeship to overseer. The mobilisation found him freshly arrived from the Grand Prix of the French Automobile Club, where as mechanic to one of the champions he had raced with him in an "Open Tomb."



Chignole

He immediately volunteered in the Aviation Corps, where his knowledge on the subject quickly gained him an opening, and I had the good luck to draw him as first mechanician.

Most minute about every detail, with the air of being disorderly, a great worker who had the appearance of never doing anything in particular, he was an ace; no one could hold a candle to him when a refractory magneto had to be taught something about the laws of the clutch. His intuition was legendary. After pointing his little flat nose heavenward and sniffing once or twice, he would gently inform us of atmospheric prognostics which were seldom or never inexact.

“To-day you will be rocked; no funny business up there I tell you. On the way back you’ll find it pretty nasty about four hundred yards above ground. Don’t be shaky though.”

Or, “A real love of a day. A perfect honeymoon trip. You should worry.”

His manual virtuosity was surprising. His fingers would glide over the motor almost caressing, ticking it so to speak. Every other minute he would shriek at his second man, a little fellow from the Beauce, who wasn’t over clever.

“Get a move on you there. Hurry up I tell

you ! Look lively I say ! Hand me the monkey wrench. Give me the pinchers. Give me the ' Chignole ' ! ”

Chignole, or what-you-may-call-it, in our slang is a term applied to a little hand bit. My chief mechanic had a particular affection for the above mentioned tool and he never let go of it without howling for it a second later and accusing his trembling aid of voluntarily depriving him of his pet. From thence sprung his nickname “ Chignole,” which had assured his popularity.

After having recounted in detail all the latest gossip of the Squad, Chignole took on a serious air which was most unbecoming and, blushing a bit, said :

“ Look here, old fellow, I want to ask a favour of you.”

“ Well ? ”

“ I don't dare——”

“ Do you need money ? ”

“ Not much ! It wouldn't worry me a bit to ask you for that. It wouldn't be the first time, would it now ? ”

“ Well then ? ”

“ Now look here. You're going back to the front. Whom have you chosen to replace poor old V. ? ”

"Not yet decided."

"Shall you continue to take any old observer that comes along?"

"I don't know. Why?"

"Because—I wanted to ask you. Will you take me as observer? Don't worry, I'll continue to look after the 'Taxi,' but do you see what I mean? I feel like thunder at always being left on the ground while you are up there in the blue. I am eating my heart out about it. Just fading away. Will you take me?"

"I am willing. But your mother? You're all she's got left. What will she say? You haven't been risking your life up until now, but you have been doing your duty just the same. Why court danger? What will your mother say!"

"Mamma! H'mph! why she is the very one that is sick of seeing me in a soft spot, her kid's got to have the Croix de Guerre just the same as the others. The fellows from Montmartre have shown what stuff is in them! All aces, every man jack of them. Now will you take me? Say you will, we'll form a gang and what a gang! we should worry. And as to flying, I promise you something worth the name."

20 CHIGNOLE INTRODUCES HIMSELF

Without a word I took his hands in mine, his rough working-man's hands, and out in that frivolous garden, where nightly roams the shadow of Madame de Pompadour clad in a robe of moonlight, we sealed a double pact with the unknown, with destiny, with to-morrow.

CHAPTER II

CHIGNOLE HAS AN IDEA

It's all settled. At least! Chignole has been named aerial observer. Some man who had an interest in the fellow managed to get the better of the Military Bureau. My pal now wears the wing on his left arm and has a grenade embroidered on his collar; henceforth he belongs to the navigating personnel. He is one of them, and let me tell you he is mighty proud of it.

"It doesn't matter a bit if you're only a simple second-class soldier, a mere 'Bibi'; with what you've got on your sleeve, old fellow, I tell you, it makes people sit up and take notice. Example, my mother's concierge who up until now always used to say 'Good morning, Arthur,' nearly threw a fit this morning when she caught sight of my uniform, and bawled, 'How splendid you are! Monsieur Arthur.' Do you catch on? Monsieur! She says 'Monsieur' now. Just a shade of difference, eh?"

And Chignole continued to admire himself in the long mirror of my boudoir.

“Apropos, Old Charles (Chignole has always called me thus), don’t you think it’s about time for us to light out. The Major asked me last night if my pilot was going to mould in the general reserve station until the end of the war.”

“Why, we only got our ‘Taxi’ two days ago.”

“I am not contradicting, but the old fellow has been grumbling like the deuce.”

“Well, we’ll take a little trip this morning for his sake. Just a bit of a stroll to see if the wheel is all right, and to-morrow we will be off for the Squad.”

I dressed slowly. In a few hours I was going to leave, for ever perhaps, an atmosphere that I loved, objects that again had become familiar, and it was with delight that I prolonged the slightest gesture that would procure a moment more of joy.

Paris on a soft September morning : a Paris whose air was sweetly tepid, Paris delighting in its own calm ; its most turbulent inhabitants were at the seashore, in the mountains, all out of town somewhere.

We drove down the Champs Elysees top

speed in my grey torpedo, an old and faithful friend that I left behind with many regrets.

“Splendid! Bully! but for the love of heaven don’t go so fast. Give people time to see us. I want to show myself. Don’t you understand?”

And Chignole swelled out his chest, casting a sidelong glance at the women who stopped short, frightened by the speed of our car.

Ah, Paris, the marvellous! How I love you! Just as I would a fiancée. After all, why can’t one wed a city just as one would a woman, to study her, to understand her, to love her in the eyes of her passers-by, in the perfume of her gardens, in the colour of her sky?

“You’re pensive. You’re cooking up some joke or other, I can see it.”

A corner of the Parisian suburbs; a perfect forest of chimneys, grey shaggy building, a big station before which the rails mingle and mix like the threads of a gigantic skein. In the midst of it all a bald space of ground and some immense sheds—The General Aviation Reserve—R.G.A. (*Réserve Générale de l’Aviation*) in technical terms. A sort of huge storehouse where new machines arrive,

are tested by the pilots, and then driven by them to the front.

“All ready! not a hitch in the mill. The ‘Stabilo’ is well regulated, did you see? The pedals are no longer soft——”

We made a brief and happy ascension.

“Fine. That’s enough for to-day, to-morrow at dawn we will be off.”

“I say, ‘Old Charles,’ it’s twelve o’clock. Let’s make a bee line for Paris. The trip has made me ravenous.”

“Here, here!”

We started towards the gate. Just as we crossed the threshold we nearly bumped into the Major in command of the R.G.A., who called after us:

“Glad to see you here, boys. Splendid day for a trip!”

“I beg pardon, sir?”

“You will leave in half an hour. I have just signed your order of departure.”

“But, Major, we haven’t had lunch yet.”

“You’ll dine all the better.”

“But!——”

He raised his eyes.

“I’ll be there to see you off.”

And the old fellow walked away smiling, leaving us in the dumps.



“Old Charles”

“And I who wanted to show my glad rags to the fellows in Montmartre this afternoon! What a nuisance!”

Swearing under our breath, we moved off towards the shed. We put on our overalls, grumbling most audibly. I gave a few orders to the mechanics about forwarding our canteens, putting up my car and cancelling several of my engagements.

The Major came and shook hands with us.

“Delighted to see you start with such wonderful weather. You’ll be in Nancy by tea time. Hope to see you again soon, when you need a new machine. Good-bye, bon voyage.”

Almost angrily I pushed the gas lever. We rose in the air a second later, and headed straight for Meaux, leaving Paris far in the distance behind us, gradually becoming a more and more indefinite grey spot.

“Could you get at the oil tanks easily?”

“Ah, ‘Old Charles,’ I haven’t the heart to do anything. Just think, at the present moment I ought to be sitting in front of a Boulevard Café watching the vehicles pass by.”

We followed over the ground of the battle of the Marne, and little by little our thoughts became distracted from our recent unhappi-

ness. Our thoughts, preceding our bird, were already on the frontier, near the nest where we should sleep to-night.

“I say there, ‘Old Charles,’ slow up a little. The oil isn’t flowing right into the serpentine.”

“Naturally, it seemed to me the old mill was beginning to get hot.”

Eight hundred revolutions. Chignole with a monkey wrench in hand screwed and unscrewed.

“Well ? ”

“The pipe’s clogged.”

“What luck ! I cannot afford to risk my motor, though.”

“Nothing left but to go down.”

“Oh, la, la ! ”

We were about midway between Epernay and Chalons ; the champagne district, immense open fields, wonderfully suitable for an easy descent. We made an ordinary landing, two spirals, and I brought the machine about and touched ground between two haystacks. Chignole made a dive for the motor and, after a minute sounding, pronounced his diagnosis as solemnly as any professor of the Medical Academy.

“Oil pump’s got the grippe. That means

take out all the pipes and clean the whole business with a syphon. Empty out all the oil."

"How long will it take you?"

"If we start right in this minute we may get away to-morrow after luncheon."

I could feel the cold perspiration rolling down my back.

"That'll be nice."

"Why? That's nothing. It's really nothing at all."

"Damn the machine. I didn't mean it. Have you any money on you?"

"Ah, 'Old Charles,' as we didn't expect to leave until to-morrow, I hadn't yet laid in. I think I've got about sixteen cents. No, seventeen, here they are."

"The same here. How could I guess the old rake was going to precipitate our departure? And besides I didn't count on a breakdown. If we had reached the Squad we would have been saved."

I passed a most minute inspection of my numerous pockets. By turning them inside out I managed to scrape up forty-six cents, which joined to Chignole's fortune made sixty-three cents in all.

"And we've got to get through until to-

morrow noon, that is two beds and four meals at least. Have you an idea ? ”

Chignole scratched his head thoughtfully and then exclaimed :

“ Let’s go and have lunch first. Ideas will come with the end of the meal, perhaps.”

We ate, ate well, but the ideas did not come. We weren’t any further advanced than we were before, save that we had a serious bill mounting up at the village inn where the proprietor had treated us like princes.

“ Order the best. That inspires confidence ! ” Chignole assured me. And I had followed his advice. As we sat over our coffee the most idiotic plans passed through my brain, but none of them proved practicable.

Suddenly Chignole called the inn-keeper

“ Have you got a bicycle ? ”

“ No, Monsieur, there’s only one in the village, it belongs to the curate. He will lend it to you without a doubt.”

“ I’ve got it, I’ve got it, I’ve got an idea,” Chignole hissed in my ear. Then as he passed out of doors, he called back “ And with the curate’s bicycle, too. And they say the clergy is not up to date. Ha, ha ! ”

Towards what destiny was Chignole heading ? I had no idea. All these different

emotions had exhausted me. I fell asleep on the table and dreamed that I saw Chignole hoisted on the chariot of Fortune, hugging in his arms the horns of plenty from which rained forth an untarrying stream of gold.

CHAPTER III

CHIGNOLE SEES IT THROUGH

“ A CIGAR, Monsieur l’Aviateur ? ”

The cordial and deferent inn-keeper held out a half-open box from which exhaled the delicious aroma of Havana tobacco. My hand hesitated. Should I take a cigar ? A cigar for which I should perhaps not be able to pay !

“ They’re excellent, Monsieur—excellent. I can vouch for them. I have put some aside for my boy who is out there too, in the trenches. He is fond of those that have spots on them. He says they’re the best.”

My scruples vanished in the delightful smoke that curled towards the beams of the ceiling from which hung numerous opulent smoked sausages.

What had become of Chignole who started alone on his conquest for gold, or rather, to be more exact, on a conquest for a modest blue bank note that would clear up a rather embarrassing situation ?

As I sat there puffing away, I made many and bitter reflections on the vicissitudes of fortune, and my pessimism was on the rise. Furthermore Chignole had not taken the trouble to inform me how long he intended to be away, and that uncertainty only aggravated my worry.

“ A little brandy, Monsieur ? ”

“ Hum, perhaps it would be wiser——”

“ Oh, no perhaps. Let me pour it out, I am sure it will be to your taste. I buried it when the boches came down on us. It’s almost historic brandy you see.”

I attempted to drown my anxiety in a glass of the venerable liquid, which, of course, resulted in an access of sadness and impatience. And so as to shake off my inaction, I made up my mind to wrestle with the oil pumps, the initial cause of our misfortunes.

The whole village had naturally flocked out to where our “ Cuckoo ” had alighted, and on my arrival the little circle suddenly developed into a double row of curious spectators, who followed my every moment with amused satisfaction, not by any means devoid of respect. Under any other circumstances I should have been glad to answer their queer questions, but to-day their demands were ill timed. With-

out a word, and as though deaf, I went about repairing the motor. A few moments later my hands were covered with a dirty, ill-smelling, sticky substance. I was plunged in the labyrinth of the oil tubes.

My thoughts went out to Chignole, Chignole my only hope.

On his return from his mysterious trip would his nose be turned up or turned down? To tell the truth that nose was as good as a barometer; it was gifted with a sort of elasticity, thanks to which it responded almost spontaneously to the various and diverse sentiments of its proprietor.

I had seen it congested, stiffened, splendid, scrutinising the heavens on the days of victory, days of expeditions which were "talked about," and then again bloodless, limp, long enough it seemed to me to touch the ground, on days when the weather was bad or we had ill luck.

What expression would it wear when he should come back? In order not to think I worked like a demon, flat on my back so as the easier to get at some screws that were just out of convenient reach. And all I could see was the sky, a September sky, a pale transparent blue dotted here and there by tiny fluffy white clouds.

And little by little night began to fall, the hay stacks lost their golden hue and turned a dull grey. A deep violet haze rose as if by magic and enveloped the smooth trunks of the pine trees as the fumes of a censor curl about the columns of a cathedral, while the crickets, hidden in the grass already heavy with dew, began to screech their eternal praises of summer.

“Not hungry, Monsieur l’aviateur ?”

I was seated at table, but my throat seemed throttled by an invisible hand, which hardly permitted a mouthful to go down.

“And they say that work creates an appetite. I should think you had worked hard enough this afternoon to want some nourishment. Is your machine fixed now ?”

“Y-e-es.”

“What became of your mechanician ?”

“I don’t know, or rather yes, I do know. He went out for a little spin,—a little spin, he has friends in the neighbourhood.”

I lied with assurance. Besides, under the circumstances what else could I do ?

And I became more and more embarrassed on discovering that the inn-keeper had taken particular pains to tickle my palate by supplementing his ordinary fare with succulent ad-

ditions. Meanwhile my debts continued to pile up. What to do? Telegraph? Impossible. I was in the army zone.

And still no Chignole. An auto stopped in front of the door. My heart began to beat like a trip hammer. Disillusion! only three officers who saluted me most courteously.

“Are you the aviator that had a breakdown?”

“Himself.”

“My friends and I have come to ask you a favour.”

“Certainly. What can I do for you?”

“Allow me to present them. This gentleman is the superintendent of the near-by hospital, this one the surgeon in charge, and I, I am the commissary at the railway station.”

“Delighted, gentlemen.”

“We are all three ardent adepts at bridge, but will you believe me we have never been able to find a fourth. So just as soon as we heard that an aviator had alighted in our whereabouts and didn’t intend leaving until to-morrow——”

“You naturally said to yourselves, ‘He’ll make a fourth.’”

“That’s it.”

“But, but——”

Instinctively I hesitated, turning over in my pocket the debris of our fortune which Chignole had left with me.

“Surely, sir, you cannot refuse us. We play a very mild game. A quarter of a cent a point.”

After all, what if I should win? What if luck were on my side. Perhaps those officers had been guided by my lucky star, and like the Magi of old would leave with me (in spite of themselves) the treasures with which they were laden.

Alas, it certainly was not my lucky star that guided them in my direction. About ten o'clock in spite of numerous daring “no trumps,” and a few irresistible “doublings” I found that I owed them twenty-seven francs and some centimes.

In order to gain time before finally settling up, I rang and ordered the inn-keeper to bring us up the best he had, and after consuming the contents of several venerable dust-covered bottles, my companions became very gay and almost eloquent on the subject of my hospitality and my pluck in spite of my luck. It was time for them to return to their several services. They rose to take leave and I was about to be disqualified for ever when the

door opened and Chignole, Chignole with his nose in the air, burst upon us, calling over his shoulder to the inn-keeper, "Bring up some champagne! The best!"

I almost fell upon his neck, and the inn-keeper, touched by our affectionate greeting, confided to the officers, "Ah, how aviation unites people! What wonderful comradeship; how they love each other. It's a real pleasure to see them."

I poured out the champagne and, as we all touched glasses, I felt Chignole slipping something into my hand. A blue bank note! Saved! We were saved!

Half an hour later in an imposing twin-bedded room big as a dance hall, and on whose chimney-piece a bouquet of wax orange blossoms reposed peacefully beneath a glass cover, we exchanged our glad impressions.

"Where on earth did you find the money?"

"That's my affair, 'Old Charles.'"

"But?"

"Well, since you will know. I remembered I had a cousin living at Chalons, so with the curate's bike I rode over and he was glad enough to lend me the money, see?"

I didn't wish to seem doubtful, so said nothing.

“ Well, to-morrow at dawn we’re off. I didn’t lose any time either, old chap. You’ll see for yourself that your pilot hasn’t forgotten everything he ever learned about machinery. By the way, lend me your watch. Mine’s stopped and doesn’t seem to want to go again. So as I always wake up first——”

“ My watch ? ”

Chignole suddenly grew as embarrassed as a child caught telling a lie.

“ My watch,—why I haven’t got it, I left it in Paris.”

“ But you had it this morning.”

“ No, I didn’t.”

And suddenly his face broadening out into a grin, “ Bother your curiosity ! Yes, I did have it. But I haven’t got it any more, my old family turnip. We’ve eaten it up and drunk it up. There wasn’t anything else to do. We just had to have the money ! So I sold it at Epernay. It was no easy job either, let me tell you. Because I was in uniform the old Jew didn’t want to buy it. Bah ! it would have happened sooner or later. When I was a civilian it used to be in pawn by the fifteenth of every month and stayed there until the first when I had money enough to redeem it. It must have had an intimate acquaintance with

every pawnbroker's safe in the Capital, but that wasn't glorious. To-day it left me like a soldier, died at its post to save the honour of the Aviation Corps, well, 'Old Charles,' let me tell you there are not many watches that can boast of that."



CHAPTER IV

CHIGNOLE SAYS, "GIVE HER THE GAS"

"THE Uhlans! The Uhlans!"

I woke up with a start, but instead of the patibulary faces of German cavalry men as such an exclamation might have led me to expect, my eyes fell upon the happy spectacle of Chignole, shirt tail hanging in the wind, dancing a fancy step to the tune of the Marche Lorraine, which he was whistling through his teeth.

"I suppose you think it funny to wake a fellow up like that!"

"Only did what I could. You ought to be ashamed of yourself to be in bed at this hour. Quarter past nine! You're taking yourself for a gentleman of leisure, I do declare."

These words, punctuated by violent gestures, gave me a clearer notion of things here below, and with a supreme effort I jumped out of bed, not, however, without shaking the floor most considerably.

"Ah, 'Old Charles,' that's the way to throw in the clutch. That's the boy!"

"Hurry up, and shut up! This is no time for phrases, we ought to have been off long ago."

"Gone? With this weather? Why look out of the window! God's turned on all the faucets, and there's nothing we can do to help it, not even weep, because that would make the Marne overflow."

Outside, the countryside was dripping wet, the tiled roofs washed clean and bright while from each leaf of the virginia creeper that encircled our window bright diamonds shot downwards.

"Our 'Cuckoo' must be taking a fine cold!"

"Let's go out and say good morning to it at least."

We made a rapid toilet. Nevertheless Chignole took particular pains with his puttees in order to outline his harmonious muscularity.

"My son," he responded in reply to my lifted eyebrows, "if it's style that makes a man, as somebody once said, it's certainly legs that make the soldier."

Café au lait and thick slices of buttered bread awaited us in the dining-room. The inn-

keeper politely inquired after our health, and consulted our taste with regard to the menu for luncheon. Then buttoned up tight in oil-skins, we started out towards the field.

The deluge continued. Our plane riveted between the hay-stacks was a sad spectacle to behold. From time to time, the wind would make the wings rattle, and then it almost seemed like an unfortunate bird caught out of its nest, shivering beneath its damp feathers.

“ Do you think it will clear up ? ”

Chignole pointed his nose towards the heavy clouds that were hanging low in the foggy sky, drew a long breath and then, as sententious as an oracle, said, “ My belief is that we are in for it. Lots of dirt. Towards evening, though, it might clear up.”

“ In other words if it doesn't rain it will be fine ! Humph ! ”

Autumn had already begun to announce its arrival. The trees had changed their green robe to one of cloth of gold, and the ruts in the little country road were filled with fallen leaves.

“ I've found one ! ”

“ One what ? ”

Chignole victoriously brandished a mon-

strous snail between his thumb and first finger.

“Throw that dirty thing away!”

“Dirty thing? Do you call that a dirty thing? Ah, ‘Old Charles,’ you mustn’t disdain the gifts of the Almighty like that. When you are out for sport, you are out for sport. The rain makes them come to life, and we’ll have a fine lot in no time.”

An hour later Chignole had gathered a hundred or more snails from beneath the grape vines and carried them to the hotel, carefully wrapped in his handkerchief.

How unlike is each day to the other! Yesterday we were down and out, to-day we were reeking with wealth. We finished luncheon and with the first puffs of our cigars exchanged a few optimistic reflections.

“I always imagined that with a pilot like you, an observer would never get bored.”

“Most kind of you, old fellow, but your pilot would have been much happier if he had landed you safely in Nancy without a stop-over.”

“What’s done is done! Why worry?”

“You might say, ‘Who’s done is done.’” I had not forgotten that my friend had sold his watch but yesterday in order to avoid our

dishonour. Think of beginning our adventures by skipping out without paying ! How awful !

The clouds lifted ; presently became almost transparent, and now and again one could catch sight of a patch of blue.

“ In two hours we can give her the gas ! ”

“ I am afraid that will be a little late to start. Night comes on so quickly at this season.”

“ You should worry.”

Preparations. We settled our bill without a murmur, Chignole looked the old “ Cuckoo ” over from stem to stern and then motioned the crowd to move away and make room for our departure.

“ Try to give us a swell lift-off. We must leave a good opinion behind in case we ever have to come back.”

A little girl came forward and offered us a rustic bouquet. Chignole thanked her, more touched than he would admit, and carefully tied the flowers on to the cockpit beside the little basket wherein his snails were innocently playing at loop the loop.

We started, and lifted almost immediately, for I had the apprehension that we were going to encounter a gust or two. I guided myself by the river, steadily continuing to climb higher

and higher, for we had already weathered one or two heavy shocks.

"The wind's behind us. We won't be long now."

"Look ahead of us a bit." I pointed towards a sheet-like mass that barred the horizon.

"It would perhaps be wiser to look for a landing place."

"Go down?"

"In those clouds we'd be lost for sure."

"So much the worse for us. I am not going down yet. We've got to sleep in Nancy to-night at all costs. Why they'd say we did it on purpose. Enough hitches for me, thank you. It might become a habit."

"As you say then."

The clouds soon became so thick that we were absolutely blind as to direction and were obliged to use our compass. Were we flying, or rolling or swimming, which? It would certainly have been difficult to tell. We seemed to have fallen into a new unheard-of element.

Naturally it was the air, but air which had become palpable, air that we could *see* all about us, sometimes in bunches, sometimes in long-drawn-out streaks. And at the same

time it was watery, to judge from our uniforms which were wringing wet by that time.

“All right for a while, but if it goes on like this much longer——”

“Light me a cigarette, instead of screaming into the emptiness like an idiot.”

The atmosphere suddenly grew greyer. Our watch said six o'clock. Night was on us. There was no longer any doubt, Chignole was right, it would have been more prudent to have descended.

“Night's coming.”

“Well, and we've no lights.”

“Then what?”

“Down we go.”

“Not too quick there, my snails might be seasick.”

I headed for earth, most prudently. Fifteen hundred yards.

“Where are we?”

“If we've kept straight we ought to be just over St. Mihiel.”

“Yes, but if we've not kept straight, then what?”

A thousand yards. Nothing. Chignole, his head stuck out of the plane, was literally smelling the wind. Five hundred yards. The clouds grew thinner and thinner. I pushed

down the lever and at two hundred yards we dashed out of the fog as from a tunnel.

“ We’re not far from the front. Look at the trenches.”

Chignole pointed out some pale-looking sinuosities that were rapidly fading from view in the oncoming darkness.

“ It was time we stopped.”

I hadn’t finished the phrase before a characteristic white puff followed by several others burst in the air not a hundred yards in front of us.

“ And right in our faces, too ! ”

“ Why, we are over the German lines ! ”

“ We’re going to catch it sure.”

“ Give her the gas ! What sport ! ”

“ You’re easily pleased, my lad.”

“ You should worry. It isn’t every one who can have a beginning like ours.”

I pulled on the lever and up we started into the unknown, followed by numerous bursting shells which kept growing closer and closer.

“ Oof ! I was feeling hot there for a moment.”

“ So much the better, let them go right on wasting their shells like that.”

“ But our situation isn’t a bit better than it was, in fact——”

“All we have got to do is to keep on going.”

“Until the last drop of gas.”

“That’s a fine title for a song.”

“Yes, but you’ll be more likely to weep than sing in a minute.”

Our thoughts were not of the gayest I can tell you. In an hour our reservoir would be empty and we would be obliged to descend, no matter where we were, running the chances of lighting on a house, in a river, on a forest, wherever luck chose to land us, and above all more than likely inside the German lines, for in spite of every effort I could not control the plane against the wind, and incontestably we were being blown out of our course far more than we imagined. Chignole, too, I felt, was plunged in bitter apprehension and I hardly dared turn and glance at him. Suddenly I felt a rap on my shoulder.

“Ah, the swine ! They’re getting away from me !”

“Who ? What ?”

“My snails ! They’re all over the place.”

In the bumping we had received, the lid of their basket had opened and my friend’s boon companions were using the cockpit for a skating rink.

“Try and find out where we are instead of worrying me with your dirty animals.”

“Ah, ‘Old Charles,’ as to our route I don’t give a whoop, do you hear? But my snails are scared. I don’t want them to abandon me. Why, if we’re obliged to sleep with the Germans to-night we will have at least brought our dinner with us.”

Our motor sputtered—started again—stopped.

‘No more ‘coco.’”

Down we started, I trying to prolong the descent in order to lengthen our time for reflection.

“As soon as we touch ground, if I don’t see anything, I’ll jump out and discover whether or not we’re on the Boche territory. If we are, I’ll whistle and you’ll set the ‘Cuckoo’ afire.”

“That’s a go.”

We didn’t say another word. Every nerve strained, I tried to decipher the mystery of the shadow. It was extremely cold, but I could feel the beads of perspiration standing out on my forehead. What a queer sensation to feel oneself sliding ever downwards as though in a dark well, with no other indication of one’s whereabouts than the altimeter lighted by a fugitive match.

Twenty yards.

“Hold on tight, we may get a bump.”

Ten yards.

I came about. The pedals no longer responded to my pressure. Our flight was finished. We swung over on our left wing, then came a shock. Should we tip over? No! One wheel was bent but our plane was safe.

I jumped down. We were in the middle of a field. There was a row of trees quite near us, perhaps a road. I ran towards it, stumbling in the furrows. Yes, there was the road. Groping in the darkness I finally came to a milestone. At last! Now then the matches. They were all wet, refused to light. France? Germany? The blood was beating in my temples, so I thought my head would burst. Light. I read:

DÉPARTEMENT DE MEURTHE ET MOSELLE

NANCY—18 kilomètres.

CHAPTER V

CHIGNOLE TAKES SOME PHOTOGRAPHS

FROM the moment we joined the squad luck was against us. A continual drizzle kept our planes inside their tightly closed sheds. The east wind was already sharp and snatched most unmercifully the few remaining leaves from the trees that bordered the plateau, while the near-by encircling hills had already donned their dark brown autumn mantles.

This forced inaction got on Chignole's nerves, for he had been impatiently waiting to make his first raid. For a little while he amused himself by organising a series of races, with the gracious co-operation of his snails that we had brought with us from Champagne. But presently his Corsairs began to feel the cold and retired to their shells for the winter; not even the freshest and most tempting lettuce leaves could draw them from their cover.

Dressed since dawn in his fur-lined overalls, Chignole could be seen poring over the map,

tracing with his finger for the twentieth time the course we should eventually pursue.

My former second mechanician Racine, who since Chignole's appointment to a place among the navigators, had been advanced to first mechanician, was completely submerged beneath a flood of orders and counter-orders that his "boss" literally hurled at him, accompanied by expressive gestures.

"Now then, Racine, get a move on! Why you are literally taking root here! I told you to put a little glycerine into the radiators! And my pinchers? Where are my sharp pinchers? With what do you expect me to cut my bombs loose—my teeth?"

And then he would turn towards me and add with pity in his voice: "These country people, they are willing enough but they haven't an idea in their noddles! Not an idea, that's the misfortune. If my blood turns into turnip juice pretty soon it will be all their fault."

Racine stoically endured the deluge, like a child of the soil, a peasant accustomed to inclemency.

At two o'clock we had been ordered to assemble in flying costume, and at the appointed hour we were all standing beside our "Cuckoos."

"I am going to take my camera. If we meet anything interesting, click, and I've got it," said Chignole, adjusting his helmet over his woollen muffler.

Then we proceeded to wait. The clouds were still hanging very low, but through a large rift we caught sight of the blue sky. The captain arrived.

"The weather is too uncertain. The raid is postponed. Gentlemen, you are free."

"What rot!" was the comforting exclamation, offered by my companion.

"So say I, old man. I know how anxious you are to get 'out there,' but be resigned. We must wait. To cheer you up, what do you say to a little trial flight? I can authorise your pilot to——"

Up we went, a bit shaken by the wind.

"You might have left the bombs behind. It would have been much easier to manage our machine."

"Never thought of it! You should worry! Give her the gas!"

The wind against us, we mounted rapidly toward the blue hole in the black band of "ceiling" which had been hypnotising us.

"It's idiotic to have countermanded the

bombardment. You can see just as well as any day ! ”

He was right. The sun was shining brightly on the German side, and “over there” the clouds were much less dense.

“ Yes, I tell you, we could have done it ! ”

“ Well, it’s up to us to go if we want to. The cough drops are all ready,” and he motioned towards the bombs.

“ Aha ! I see now why you didn’t have them unloaded. Monsieur had his own little idea, didn’t he ? ”

“ You think you’re smart, don’t you ? ”

“ If we go alone, the Germans won’t do a thing to us. Oh, no ! And when we get back the captain may have something to say about our ‘ infringing ’ on his orders.”

“ Oh, he may say something, on general principle, but at heart he’ll be as proud as punch. Besides, nothing proves that we may get back ! ”

“ Evidently ! ”

“ Then if we don’t get back, we won’t be punished. But we will have done something ‘ chic.’ What do you decide, old chap ? ”

Fourteen hundred revolutions. Full swing. We passed their lines. Bro-oom ! three white puff balls !

“ I think they’ve seen us ! ”

Broo-oom ! We were literally surrounded by explosions.

“ Hum ! They’re getting the range all right.”

We mounted higher and higher, presently completely disappearing in the mist.

“ We’re on the right track. The wind is against us. Give her the gas ! ”

In the clouds the sensation was exactly like what one feels on board a ship in heavy weather ; rolling, pitching, and high waves.

Chignole began to sing some idiotic ditty.

The minutes that passed were long, oh, so long. I could not even see the extremity of our wings for the mist, and our biplane must have been in a queer position seen from below.

“ We’re not far from our goal.”

Rapid descent. The fog lightened. We could catch a glimpse of earth as though through a veil.

“ Can you get a line on them ? ”

“ Yes, a little to the left, the station.”

We were just above the chosen point. The shells bursting all about us, confirmed our suspicions.

“ Let her go ! Now’s the time ! ”

Chignole cut loose the bombs, which described large circumferences in the air before falling in a straight line. Right about face—and the wind with us we fled towards France. The clouds lifted, and worse luck, we found ourselves obliged to make the return trip through a clear blue sky.

“Don’t go to sleep back there!”

“No danger, ‘Old Charles.’”

“There comes one now!”

Through the pane in the floor I could see a Fokker rapidly rising in our direction.

“Fortunately the wind is with us.”

Their guns had ceased firing. The bird with the black crosses began rapidly to gain on us. And our lines were still ten kilometres away! We were obliged to accept the fight, and under unfavourable circumstances, since theirs was a more rapid machine than ours.

I thought of my companion for whom this was the first trip. How was he going to brave the Boche? How was he going to defend us? One hand on the ribbon, the other on the butt of the machine gun, his eyes fixed on our aggressor, Chignole seemed to court the fray. The enemy arrived on our level, turned about brusquely and dived downward so as to catch us from below. I did the same thing in the

opposite direction, and for a second or two we found ourselves nose to nose. His machine-gun sputtered, tac-a-tac tac-a-tac! I couldn't seem to hear ours.

"Fire! Fire!" I yelled.

"The blamed thing is stuck!"

"Your rifle then!"

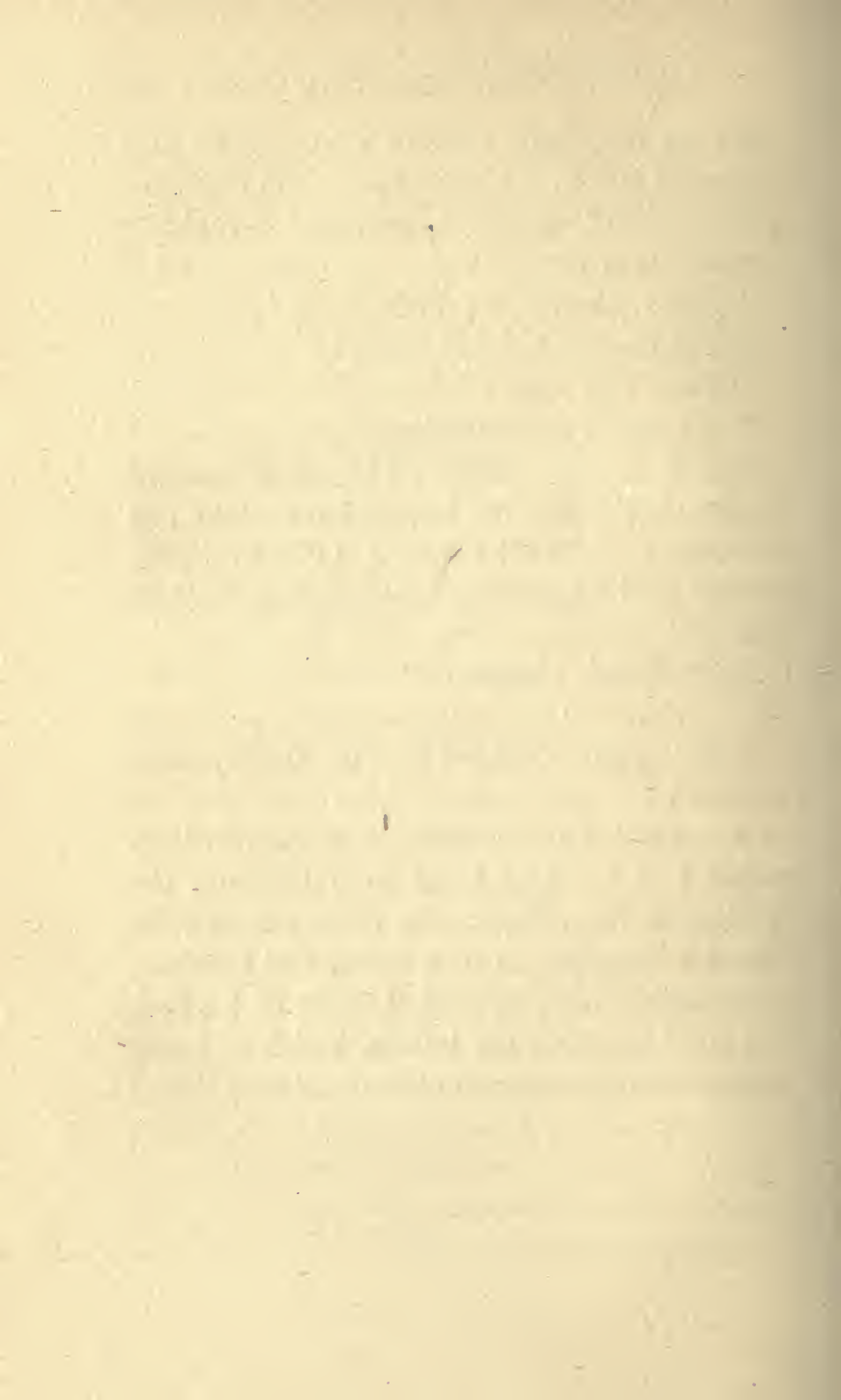
"We forgot the cartridges!"

A yell of rage. Then I plunged downward to give the Boche the impression that he had touched us. But he was a veteran, accustomed to the game, for he accompanied us on our dive.

"Chignole! Chignole!"

.
 "Are you wounded? For God's sake, answer!"

He must be wounded, I conjectured. I could just see him lying in a heap on the bottom of the cockpit. My hand gripping the wheel I managed to turn about and beheld—Chignole standing upright, a smile on his lips, his chest bared to the bullets, kodak in hand, calmly taking snapshots of the Boche machine!



CHAPTER VI

CHIGNOLE WRITES TO HIS MOTHER

WITH THE ARMY,

October, 1916.

MY DEAR MOTHER—

You are probably thinking that your aviator has forgotten you. Apart from some post cards, necessarily brief, you have as yet received no word from me. It is not entirely my fault though. First of all there was our breakdown in Champagne where I nearly grew grey with worry, and then our arrival with the squad two weeks ago. When a fellow actually does get somewhere, of course, it takes time for him to become acclimated; and then after all, why not admit it, I wanted to wait until I had actually bombarded the enemy so as to assure you that I am not a slacker, a good-for-nothing.

First of all, then, I want you to know how happy I am, really happy. My highest desire was reached the day I was appointed observer.

I am not a shrinker, it's not my nature, Mamma. Yesterday I was merely a machinist and I haven't forgotten it. I am proud of it, and it's darn useful to have been one. You see now any fellow that is sent out here to look after "our cuckoo" can't pull the wool over my eyes. They can tell me as much as they like, "Your motor is O.K."; if it isn't, all they've got to do is to dry up and get on the job. See!

And my pilot doesn't understand a thing about his engines. He would be bored to death if he had to get his hands dirty, so he leaves that part out.

To be more at ease, I have just left our mess where L, nicknamed "Live wire" on account of his thinness, was playing the piano with his feet. I have taken refuge in the shed, and in the cockpit of our plane, in the pilot's seat, my pad on my knees, I'm all alone with you and can talk to you much easier.

I am going to introduce you to my comrades. First of all, my boss, rather stout, very amusing. For instance, always dressed in black. Perhaps he thinks it makes him look slimmer. He has been nicknamed "the black aviator." He never worries. The more we are bombarded, the more he likes it. Sometimes he even laughs outright.

Then comes Count de P., owner of a racing stable. At the last Meet at Moulins his horses got several prizes. Naturally the squad drank champagne every day for a week after that.

W. is an American. Volunteered for service in France. That's what I call chic. We call him "Whiskey" for short because he has a fondness for that drink, which to me smells like roaches. He's brought out a complicated apparatus for making cocktails. Only we can't get ice. He is waiting impatiently for it to snow. He is an ace, a real ace.

C. is the son of a celebrated painter, the man who sees everything green. His famous picture, "The Woman in Green," is in the Luxembourg Gallery, they say. Well now if his father sees life green, let me tell you the son sees things all rose-colour. He and my pilot are the liveliest of the whole squad. They spend their time getting up practical jokes, and stuffing people till they almost burst.

Yesterday the weather was rotten. All thought of flight being impossible, the officers got permission to go down town. At midnight my boss and C., who had not accompanied the others, got out of bed and fired the alarm signal. A few minutes later a dozen

motors rushed in bringing officers who had been torn from their sleep or their pleasure. We were killing ourselves on the inside you can bet.

When I found myself in the middle of all those swell fellows, I said to myself, "My son, look to yourself. You must learn how to swim in such circles. No monkeyshines if you want to get on here."

I always compliment my pilot. He is a funny fellow, who doesn't care a dash who thinks ill of him so long as no one tells him.

I am sort of half private secretary to the Vicomte de P. He gets almost as many letters as a Prime Minister, but he used to classify them by putting them in his pockets without opening them. I've put order into all that business.

I am "Whiskey's" best friend. I've found in the store-room of a little grocer shop out here two or three old bottles of "Black and White." I bought them and gave them to "Whiskey." He almost wept with joy.

As to C., as long as I am at his disposal to play a practical joke of some sort, all is well. No matter what the penalty, so long as every one laughs.

All day long it's "Chignole, this way ;

Chignole, that——” I am a spoiled baby already. There isn’t anything they wouldn’t do for me or I for them.

Shall I give you an example? Before I joined the squad they used to play poker, bridge, and baccarat. Games for princes only. I never could have kept up with their pace. Well, would you believe it, so that I shouldn’t be left out in the cold they’ve asked me to teach them “La Manille.” “La Manille,” as we play it in Montmartre, at the cafés in the rue des Abbesses. And every day, so to speak, you can see your Chignole playing “Manosche” with the Vicomte de P.

They’re good fellows to know later on. If ever I come back, thanks to them, I may be able to get a lift in the world. Then you won’t need to worry any more, it’ll be your turn for easy going.

I am enclosing quite an interesting photograph, my first bombardment. About a week ago we were followed by a Fokker. My machine-gun went queer with the first shot I fired, and he was peppering us for fair. Luckily he was a rotten shot. So, to pass the time as I had nothing else to do, I photographed him—at ten yards’ distance.

My pilot insisted on mentioning this in his

report. They made a lot of fuss about me. I was as much complimented as though I had brought down a machine. The photos have been added to the golden book of the squad, where all the exploits are recorded. Lots of noise about nothing, I say.

So you see I haven't much time to get lonesome. Nevertheless I think often of you, of Montmartre, of Paris. At sundown especially there is a moment when there's a wonderful light in the sky. I wish I was educated enough to express what I feel then. It's all red and gold and violet, all the colours we know about, and others too that we never saw before and will never see again because they change every night. And that same minute in our little kitchen, rue des Saules, you are preparing your supper over the little oil stove. I can just see you stirring the tapioca so that it will cook well. Through the window you can see the Moulin de La Galette stretching its arms out into the sky, and the chimneys all bathed in moonlight look like Pierrots gone into mourning.

Oh, Mamma, I am sure your thoughts are far away. They are not in the least in what you are doing. They are flying out towards me, and I seem to feel their wings hovering about me.

Mamma, your little boy is somebody now. The little street urchin of Paris, the former mecano, the workman in overalls, thanks to the war, has become the rival of the highest. He has had sensations that many a rich man can never feel.

To go up into the heavens, on a superb morning, the sun shining right into your face and entering right into your being, so to speak, by every pore of your body, and still keep going right on up like a god, towards God. Below the earth is nothing at all. A mere panorama to see which you wouldn't pay ten sous at the door. To sail ahead in the unknown with danger all about you, bearing danger with you; to come down fairly drunk with light, your heart overflowing with the heavenly blue, and then at last to touch good old mother earth as though waking up from a fairy tale, Oh! if you only knew! If only you knew! Be good to yourself, old lady. Old, what am I saying? Only you must not worry about me, the snow must not fall on your hair, your hair that you smooth down tight, too tight, beneath your widow's bonnet. You would be so good-looking if only you weren't so sad.

Mamma, this evening I am going to climb

up into your lap just as I used to and, putting my arms about your neck, I am going to whisper low into your ear, "You can kiss me good night, Mamma, because I have been a good boy to-day."

CHAPTER VII

CHIGNOLE AND BOUDOU-BA-DABOU

“ I BET on the blue ! ”

“ Two sous on the green.”

“ I’m good for ten of the red. He’s in excellent form to-night.”

After dinner, gathered around our mess table, we were making the final preparations for a race wherein Chignole’s snails played the leading parts.

Each snail entered wore a distinctive colour painted on his shell, which, of course, aided us to follow very closely the different stages of the struggle.

Up to the present the sportive manifestations had been composed wholly of flat races. But my chum, de D., was an ardent admirer of the steeplechase, so to please our celebrated turfsman, that evening we were giving an obstacle race.

The great difficulty for our thoroughbreds was the crossing of the river which, by the way,

was nothing more nor less than a tin wafer box jammed between two leaves of the table.

This crossing the river would settle an interminable discussion which had occupied the entire conversation during several meals. It would also settle several interesting wagers.

We had been divided into two camps ever since that infernal river question came up.

“It’s all right to put a river into our steeple track, but can the snails swim?”

And thereupon interpolations, tumultuous discussions, and finally the betting began.

The moment was a solemn one. The champions were all on the starting line. The books were closed. Chignole, to whom the place of starter had been confided, seized a big ordnance revolver and fired a shot! They were off! They were off—slowly.

It would be a full hour before the first one could possibly pass the winning post, that is to say, the tempting lettuce leaf that was attracting him. So, therefore, outside a few maniacs who did not abandon the track, the others sought some new means of amusement. Chignole and I went out and started towards the shed.

Each evening at the same hour, and as though instinctively, we wandered out towards

our bi-plane to wish it good night. Besides Chignole often had a few observations, almost always justified, to make to our mechanician. And he gave his orders in a tone that did not admit reply.

“What’s this rag on the ground here?”

“Why——”

“And those drops of oil? Your pump is leaking, idiot! Aren’t you strong enough to tighten the screws?”

“But Monsieur——”

“Monsieur? He’s calling me Monsieur now! Perhaps he thinks he will appease me that way. Hm, poor ass! Now look here, my lad, if ever I catch any oil on that floor again I’ll—I’ll—make you lick it up!”

That evening Chignole was not satisfied. He walked round and round the machine without saying a word to Racine, who was much impressed by this unaccustomed silence. Chignole plunged his nose into the cockpit and then let forth a roar.

“I thought it was too good to be true! I knew I’d find something out of the ordinary.”

“What—what—is it?” murmured Racine, rolling up his china blue eyes towards heaven.

“I don’t want any such slipshod mecanos

as you. Look what you've left in there! Over there, near the seat."

And he pointed towards a sort of brown bundle which was hardly distinguishable in the darkness.

Racine described an arc with his body, disappeared a second inside the machine and presently emerged holding a dog in his hands. The brown package then was a dog, a stray dog that had mistaken our cockpit for his kennel.

He had the head of a bull, much wrinkled and flat nosed, the body of a fox terrier, and to complete him the tail of a spaniel, a flowing tail. To be brief, the queerest make-up imaginable: ridiculous, monstrous, not to say comic.

"Look at that for a dog!"

"Why he's got at least thirty different races all rolled into one."

"Looks like a Senegalese."

"Let's baptise him."

"All right, here goes: Boudou-ba-Da-bou."

"Whew! that's too long. Takes all day to reel it off."

"We'll call him 'Boudou' for short. And I'll take him on. With an instructor like me



Chignole and Boudou-ba-Dabou



he'll get somewhere in this world. Ah, 'Old Charles,' he'll have to toe the mark."

Boudou was adopted with enthusiasm. The proud possessor of a collar that bore the insignia of the squadron, he was one of us. Independent, rebellious, he showed affection to no one but Chignole. When he looked up at him, his nose would wrinkle, his tail would wag proudly, and his eyes had a singular expression of goodness and gratitude.

He was an ardent admirer of Diana, called "Didy," a wonderful Belgian shepherd dog, whose master, de P., was duly proud of her. But she, slender and supple, paid little heed to the advances of this humble pretender.

"Ah! you can see she's a Vicomte's dog, my poor old Boudou. Our ancestors may have pulled down the Bastille, but aristocrats will always be aristocrats. You think perhaps that 'Didy' too ought to sacrifice herself for the 'Sacred Union,' about which we hear so much. But you must never demand the impossible of women. And after all, why should you have visions of grandeur? She doesn't care a whack about you and your pretty manners, she must just be chuckling on the inside. You're young, you like to flirt a bit, I can see that. But you'll recover. You'll get over it, just the same as

Chignole did. And you'll like the others all the better for having wasted your time with this one."

Chignole continued his monologue to Boudou, who, seated at his feet, his ears fairly trembling, seemed to have a deep interest in every word; perhaps he understood, perhaps he suffered.

In the Captain's office.

"Now then, my children, I need your service. For two days, one or perhaps several long-range guns have been bombarding Nancy. The sausage balloons and the scout planes have not been able to locate them. The general staff has asked for volunteers in our squad to try to locate and take photos of those guns as they fire, so I thought of you, Chignole. You're quite a specialist at such games, I should think. How about it? Does this interest you?"

"Rather, sir!"

"You can leave when you like."

A special, almost personal, mission. My friend could not refrain from a jig-step exit to show his enthusiasm. We hurried our preparations.

"All ready?"

"Give her the gas."

The biplane had already commenced to roll when plouff! Boudou jumped into the cock-pit.

"Stop! stop!"

"Too late, old man, I'm at the end of the field. No time to quit, and I'm no good at twenty-yard turns!"

"But we can't take him with us."

"So much the worse. Hold him tight on your knees."

"Such things never happen to any one but us."

Boudou was not in the least impressed. He sniffed at the wind a bit, shivered a little, but from cold only. No dog belonging to Chignole could possibly be afraid.

"Can you see anything?"

"No. Nor Boudou either, and he's got good eyes."

I dropped down a few hundred feet, but as we descended the Boches were able to regulate their aim. In an air pocket we could feel the shots approaching nearer and nearer.

"It must be fun for those who are watching us!"

"I should smile! And now the machine-guns."

“The whole shooting match.”

Quite at ease Chignole proceeded to take numerous photographs. Boudou was asleep.

A brusque air pocket, we tipped a trifle, slipped, and I could hear distinctly above the roar of the motor a sinister cracking. Some splinters of wood flew out ahead of me. I ducked my head; Chignole flattened himself against my back and shoulders. I rebalanced the machine with great difficulty.

“Touched?”

“Don’t know. Don’t think so.”

I swerved and all gas on I made for our lines amid the crackling of machine-guns and a hail of shells.

At last we crossed our trenches; calm reigned again.

Happy as a lark I turned around and glanced over my shoulder, but my smile froze on my lips when I caught sight of Chignole’s face.

“Look! Look! Boudou is wounded.”

Convulsions were torturing the poor little animal’s body; his paws stiffened, his head now uncontrolled rolled about at each movement made by our plane; from his side the blood was gently trickling.

Boudou is going to die. We’ve stretched

him out on the grass. We stood grouped about him just as about a friend.

"I was right in loving him," murmured Chignole. "It was he who got the shot that was meant for me. Boudou! my poor old Boudou."

His eyelids fluttered over his pupils that were already glassy. But at that instant "Didy" came nosing into the group. She stopped short before the comrade whose advances she had disdained, gave a sniff or two, and then gently began licking him.

Boudou opened his eyes beneath her warm caresses. He enveloped *his* "Didy" with a long happy look that was almost human, and died while commencing his dream.

At the edge of the plateau in a little quiet wood where the pines in the winds make a noise like the sea, there is a little mound covered with moss. Above it a sign reads :

SQUADRON B. V.

BOUDOU-BA-DABOU

A DOG

KILLED WHILE ON COMMANDED SERVICE,

NOVEMBER 10TH, 1916.

CHAPTER VIII

CHIGNOLE, KING OF THE OWLS

THIS morning at roll-call volunteers were asked for night raids.

"What do you think about being an owl?"

"Those I undertook last year with V. usually finished by sensational colds in the head. Rather unhealthy, those night flies in this season, Chignole."

"I'd lend you the money to buy cough drops."

"So that's it, is it? You're tempted?"

"No risks, no glory! And besides I've an idea it would be interesting work. You see in the daytime when you bombard there is no hope of flying as low as you like to, on account of the guns and the Fokkers. Then again one can't get a good line on things. But at night we could cover our object at two hundred yards, not higher, and then let her slide, slow waltz fashion you know. Humph, you've often told me what an ugly duckling I am, so now I want to be an owl, King of the Owls."

Chignole went out to look after the necessary modifications to be made on our plane in view of its new adaptation. He went over in detail every inch of electric wiring that distributes light, produced by a little dynamo, to the searchlights and headlights aboard.

“Do you hear what I am telling you, Racine? I want you to roll the wires around with gutta percha. Double insulation. It’s not too much. Can you see us up there with a blow-out? You’d probably be abed snoring your head off, while we would be calmly preparing to get our faces smashed.”

2 a.m. The motors had just brought us from our mess where we had been trying to kill time at a saint-like game of Manille, while Chignole, in contemplation before a map, methodically traced out our course.

Only two teams had volunteered. The first, Chignole and I, the second de P. and Whiskey. But all the boys were present to see us off and wish us luck.

“Are you ready?” asked the captain.

“Yes, sir.”

“Have you noted all the points that will help you to find your way? I’ve just ’phoned over to tell them to have the auxiliary alighting

grounds near our lines remain lighted all night. So if you've an accident you won't have to think of coming down here. Have you your pocket lamps ready? Good! Now then start at a quarter of an hour's distance. Team Whiskey at two thirty, team Chignole two forty-five. The wind is due east. Careful now. Lift as quickly as you can, right opposite the little woods in front of us. Don't get tangled there. Remember!"

We passed a last inspection of our machine.

"How much gas?"

"Two hundred. I had an hour more put in. If we're caught by bad weather, we can keep going until it is light."

"Ready?"

"Hip-hip!" cried Chignole, his nose in an aggressive attitude.

"Crank her. Let her heat up a bit. I prefer not to have a cold motor."

"I hope she'll run all right and last us out."

Racine blocked the wheels and let go the propeller. Now all we had to do was to await the proper moment.

"Good-bye, see you later over D——" we call to the others.

"When we get back I'll mix you a corpse reviver."

De P. and Whiskey started and in passing us waved a joyous farewell.

They lifted, then swerved so as to rise almost above our grounds. All was going well when the sound of their motor became irregular.

“There’s a hitch in their mill.”

“They’re coming down. They’re wise.”

They were outlining a wide virage and were headed downward when a gust of wind caught them and carried them right out over the little woods.

“Will they make it?”

“Of course!”

“It’ll be a close shave!”

“Go to it! Pull on the lever!” shrieked Chignole as though Whiskey could hear him.

The plane tipped in a desperate effort and was just about to clear the obstacle when the tail caught in the crest of a tall tree.

Cries of horror—a second of agony—and then an awful crashing noise.

“Poor fellows! They’re done for.”

A long thin tongue of flame darted into the air.

“Their reservoir is afire.”

“They’re fin——”

An explosion cut the word in two. Having



The whole village had naturally flocked
out to where our "Cuckoo" had alighted

Figure 1 consists of four scatter plots arranged in a 2x2 grid, labeled (a), (b), (c), and (d) in the bottom right corner of each plot. Each plot shows the distribution of 1000 simulated data points. The top row (a) and (b) shows two distributions with different parameters, and the bottom row (c) and (d) shows two distributions with different parameters. The plots are labeled (a), (b), (c), and (d) in the bottom right corner of each plot.

come in contact with the fire their bomb had exploded. The boys had gone up with their cargo.

We were left alone. The whole squad had rushed to the scene of the accident.

We wanted to talk, to shriek, to weep, to run with the others towards the scene of the misfortune; and still there we stood stupid, our eyes fixed on the crest of the pines which stood out against the glow of the flames and took on a fantastic aspect.

"It's up to us now," and Chignole showed me the hands of our watch which marked two forty-five. I shook myself. I could just imagine what was happening out there. The search for the bodies in the hope of finding them before they were carbonised. In spite of myself I couldn't get away from an apprehension which held me as though in a vice.

"One minute late."

My hands trembled on the wheel.

"Go to it, 'Old Charles,' we must!"

His jaw squared, his eyes fixed, every muscle on Chignole's face says, "Duty, duty," in spite of sorrow. Duty first of all.

Ah! brave companion, your simple heart, void of all vain sensitiveness, heard better and quicker the voice of Conscience. The wheels

were released. We were off. The woods grew nearer, nearer. I turned the wheel. The machine obeyed my will.

Up, up we went. The horror of earth abandoned us. Up, up and ever upwards. The scythe-shaped moon had reached a harvest of stars in the heavens. And still we mount, higher and higher. Aldebaran became an immense ruby; Orion seemed so proud of his Betelgeuse, Formalhaut seemed so far distant. And now higher than ever—— Out there on the edge of the horizon there are two stars that I do not know. Can they be the souls of our two comrades about to enter the presence of God?

“The plant! I am sure it is.”

Serpents of flame seemed to be crawling along the ground, there were glimmering lights.

“The smelting furnaces!”

“Yes! Let her go!”

“Gone!!!”

I came about and headed homeward.

“One bomb hasn’t fallen!”

“What?”

“Jammed in the slide!”

“Push! push down on it! quick! it’s ignited!”



A searchlight caught us in its beam

“ I can’t push any more.”

“ Pull her up then and tip her overboard ! ”

A searchlight that had been following us for a long time caught us in its beam. By manœuvring brusquely I tried to avoid it.

“ Well, and the bomb ? ”

Vapours of nitric acid seized my throat and choked me. The bomb being already ignited, the chemical reaction of the liquids which composed it had probably begun.

I turned around in my seat ; Chignole had fainted, his head was hanging out of the cockpit, while the projector was clasped firmly in his arms.

Letting go the wheel I jumped over and grabbed the thing from his embrace. At the same moment an air pocket made my machine tip and I fell over into the cockpit. The gas still stifled me. An invisible hand seemed to be gripping me by the throat.

“ Chignole ! Chignole ! Help ! ”

The biplane left to itself continued its course. I was suffocating, my ears rang, things flitted before my eyes, quickly, so quickly, all seemed over.

CHAPTER IX

CHIGNOLE SAVES HIS BOSS

“ ‘ OLD CHARLES ’ ! ‘ Old Charles ’ ! wake up, for God’s sake wake up ! ”

These words reached my ears but seemed oh ! so indistinct, so distant. It was as though I were dreaming.

I could feel that my eyelids were open, nevertheless I could see nothing. My every limb, as though paralysed, refused to obey my command. I tried to understand, to seize the thread of my ideas, but I could not seem to manage to co-ordinate my thoughts.

“ Get up ! Stand up ! for heaven’s sake, or we’re lost ! ”

The voice grew more and more distinct. At last I recognised it. It belonged to Chignole. Suddenly the exact notion of things came upon me. The bomb that had not dropped ; Chignole pulling it out of the slide so as to throw it overboard ; the mixture of liquids already begun ; the suffocating gases that escaped ;

my inert companion, dead perhaps ! My trying to get the thing from his arms ; then suffocated myself ; a sudden blur ; the avion left to itself ; darkness.

The horror of the picture that preceded my fainting spell grew upon me with every second, and the instinct of conversation gave me a burst of energy, so at length I managed to rise on my knees.

“ Just a little effort, old fellow ! ”

A hand seized me by the collar, jerked me, and finally I found myself half seated, jammed into a corner between the pilot seat and the edge of the cockpit.

“ Quick ! quick ! take the wheel ! Steady her ! Look at the altimeter ! Fifty yards ! Hurry ! Quick ! There is still a chance.”

Mechanically I seized the wheel, my feet found the rudder bar. By sheer force of habit and numerous reflex movements I managed to establish an equilibrium.

We started upwards. Chignole wedged in beside me spoke in syncopated phrases.

“ I woke up—I saw you on the floor with the bomb in your arms—I grabbed it, and over she went—what saved me was fainting with my head hanging out.”

“ The draught brought you to yourself.”

“As to you, you had already gotten a whiff of the gas, and what a whiff. But I hadn’t time to look after you. Our taxi without a driver was dancing around like a mad animal. A regular tango! So I left my seat and climbed into yours. I curled you up as best I could, and by the way, I never saw such long legs. It’s time you sawed off a foot or two. So then I tried to get the old thing steady, but we were pitching down at a great rate. I didn’t dare pull on the lever and risk losing speed, perhaps pancake and then the finish.”

“Where are we?”

“You’re asking too much, old man. Lucky for us we started our bombardment from a high level.”

“Otherwise we would hit the ground before opening our eyes.”

“You mean we’d never have opened them.”

I tried to guess our position by the stars and then by the compass.

“Dead south, and as fast as we can get there.”

Chignole by means of some clever gymnastics managed to reach his seat behind mine. Suddenly our lights went out.

“No luck to-night!”

“ Our blinkers have gone back on us.”

“ Not astonishing, with all the capering and performances we’ve been through. The wires have been pinched, cut short, and a blow-out was imminent.”

“ I’ve my pocket lamp.”

By its feeble light we examined the electric connections ; nothing abnormal.

“ We’ll never be able to find it ; it’s in a joint, or some screw or other is lost.”

“ And our tank ? How’s the gas ? ”

Chignole turned his lamp on to the fusillades, then the stabiliser.

“ Look ! Look ! ” he cried.

Chignole’s cap was hanging on one of the spars that cross each other on the left wing. If it were to drop into our fragile propellers it would break like glass, and the splinters would cut our rudder. Delightful !

Each time we ascended Chignole carried along his cap which he intended to substitute for the unbecoming helmet in case we should be obliged to land. When our plane had begun going through its various recent contortions, the cap had flown out of the cockpit and we risked paying dearly for my comrade’s coquetry.

“ I tell you there are days and days ! Days

that everything goes wrong. I don't see very well how I can go out and get it."

"It's only holding on there because of our speed. Keep the lamp turned on it and your eyes peeled. If it should fly off, rap on my shoulder, and I'll cut off the gas. Then if it gets into the propeller there'll be no harm done."

"Amen."

Almost glued to my wheel, my eyes were searching the shadow in search of a luminous point that might guide me. But the earth was covered by a dense fog that slowly began to swell and rise towards us.

The atmosphere, once so limpid that it seemed as though we could pluck out the stars, suddenly became troubled. The ceiling of the heavens grew more and more distant, and the moon seemed to repose on a downy white field like a jewel in its display box.

"Hey! My cap!"

Nervously I pulled the gas lever towards me and waited, with my head down between my shoulders, for something to happen.

"Bon voyage! Give her the gas again!"

The motor rumbled anew.

"Never two without a third. What's going to happen next?"

"Fog, of course. How much gas left?"

"A good hour. Dawn will break by then, and somebody will congratulate Chignole for having had sense enough to bring out an hour's extra coco."

Knights of the mist, we followed our course through its mazes. Rolled up, imprisoned in its cold clammy train, sticky and wet, it seemed to us that we were wrapped in a shroud. We were doubtless passing over silent cities, mute countrysides, even battlefields where all slept through the heaven-given night truce. But had we reached French territory, or were we still over the enemies' lines?

Dawn. The mist lifted but we could still see nothing. Prudently we descended.

We were gently sliding as though disentangling a softly knotted scarf. Nothing, still, nothing to be seen. Nevertheless it was daylight. Oh, if we could only see!

"Thirty yards. I cannot go any lower. We'll be perched on some church steeple."

The same deceptive half mist persisted.

"Swerve! Swerve!" yelled Chignole, designating before us a dark mass, whose form suddenly loomed up before us and against which we should have rushed a second later. I made a quick turn and we escaped by a hair's breadth.

"I know where we are! The factories at Jarville. A minute more and we were flattened out against them. Can't you see the four chimneys? Give her the gas. You don't need a guide to find our shed now."

And my companion, his nose in the air, let forth his joyous cry of "Hip-hip!"

A spiral curve and we alighted. Our comrades seemed in no hurry to greet us. Drawn up in double line they were standing at attention as though for guard mount. Even the mechanics in uniform had their rifles.

"Doubtless for the funeral of Whiskey and de P."

We rolled gently towards them; then suddenly the captain's voice resounded:

"Attention! Present arms!"

We stood open-mouthed with wonder.

"Well of all things! This is more confusing than playing craps with paper labels! I do believe they're saluting us!" murmured Chignole.

Our captain approached.

"Yes, my children, it's a little surprise I have prepared for you. You've earned it, though. Your valiant departure, on time, and just after seeing two of our companions blown

up. Splendid of you ! Chic ! You are worthy of those who are in the trenches, those heroes. You must have had an eventful night."

"And captain, you don't know all either ; just imagine, one of the bombs got caught and wouldn't——"

Chignole stopped short in the midst of his joyous tale and like a bashful child hung his head and continued gently :

"Enough said. If I were to tell you, sir, all that happened to us, I—I believe you'd be jealous."

CHAPTER X

CHIGNOLE WANTS A SAUSAGE

“ WE want a fourth for a game of ‘ Manille.’ ”

“ Let’s take Chignole.”

“ He went out a few minutes ago.”

“ Where has he gone ? ”

“ I’ll go and look for him. Get the table ready, I’ll bring him in.”

Leaving the mess I went to the shed where I expected to find him, but Racine was there alone, occupied in replacing one of the cross wires, or what we call “ piano strings.”

“ Have you seen Chignole ? ”

“ Yes, he just went out. He’s not in a good humour to-day. He thinks I am not quick enough. If I am permitted to say so, is it my fault if the spark plugs are dirty ? One must be fair all the same. If he were not such a good fellow at heart I would have been mad at him long ago.” And gentle Racine brandished his nippers with an air that was meant to be tragic.

Behind the shed I found Chignole lying gazing fixedly toward the firing line.

" You don't seem to be feeling well to-day. Anything wrong ? "

" No, I'm not up to snuff."

" Worried ? "

" Perhaps. My mind's a bit upside down, but I swear to you—do you hear?—I swear to you that I must have one of them."

" One what ? "

" At times they don't seem to give a rap for anybody."

" Who ? "

" They are always before me ! I even dream of them at night. They're becoming a regular nightmare."

" What on earth are you talking about ? "

" You mean to say you haven't caught on. Doesn't it drive you mad ? Ah ! that's just it with superior people ; reputation, of course. Ah, Monsieur ! Monsieur ! I must go into detail then. Always words when action is necessary. Then it doesn't get your goat every time you catch sight of their vile sausage balloons. As for me I have seen enough of them. I want one of them ! "

And he pointed out to me on the horizon two captive balloons which stood in relief against the clear sky.

" What would you have me do about it ?

Several times the avions have tried to bring them down, but the Boches have always prevented it by hauling them in just in time."

"Exactly. However, we stand a chance of getting one. They will not distrust *our* bi-plane. They will think we are merely leaving for the bombardment. Do you see? As for me, the life we are leading is positively making me old. The weather always too uncertain for words. I am getting mouldy. I need fresh air. Speak to the captain about it, will you?"

The permission was granted. Our chief even took the precautions of sending two Nieuports to cross the lines in case we were attacked. In order to render our machine more manageable and swifter we unloaded it as much as possible; only an hour and a half of gas, no bombs, only the machine-gun and the special incendiary explosive.

"We are starting off like aces."

"You bet."

We mounted rapidly on our own territory and deceived the adversary by following along the lines as though for an innocent ride. At our altitude the network of trenches looked like an indefinite stretch of canvas, an immense abandoned anthill, for nothing seemed to be alive along those whitish winding lines

which surround the hills, or spread out over the planes as though unwound from a huge interminable skein.

Our two comrades who were convoying us made pirouettes to pass the time. Our scheme really seemed to mystify the Boches, for their anti-aircraft guns sent up several volleys.

“Are you ready?”

“Yes.”

“Which one of the two shall we take?”

“The one on the right. It stands out more.”

We crossed their lines but, instead of heading straight for our objective, we kept right ahead as though on a raiding party into Germany.

Their shells accompanied us but did no damage. We made a rapid turn, and a long soaring carried us a thousand yards above our target, a yellowish body from which hung a row of small balloons. I reduced the gas and we plunged. By this time they had guessed what we were about. Their firing became more intense and more precise.

“Look, old fellow, there comes a Fokker.”

“Let it come. The Nieuports are not there for shucks.”

I hastened the descent. We sheltered our steering head from the wind as much as possible. It tended to throw us backwards,

“ Oh ! sausage of pigs,” yelled Chignole.
“ There, they are hauling it down.”

I pressed on the lever in vain. They would have brought it to earth before we could have arrived within reach. Their machine-guns joined in the party.

“ It’s lost, the game is up,” said he to me.
“ But let us return in haste. I have an idea.”
“ Oh ! if you have an idea, all right.”

We did not exchange a word ; but hardly had we reached our lines ere Chignole seized me by the shoulder and explained himself vehemently.

“ This is my idea. I’m on to their little game. As soon as they see us coming, down they pull their old sausage and hide it in the shed. Therefore, we must reach it from afar. All we’ve got to do is to take along the avion cannon. I learned how to use it at the aerial training school. The gunner is on leave, so it’s up to us. Say a word to the captain about it, will you ? ”

Once again I returned to beseech my chief whose courtesy was untiring. He didn’t make any objections to our plan, for I guaranteed the efficiency of my companion as gunner.

We departed. Our respective positions in the machine had changed. My companion was in front, one hand on the breech of his 37-mm.

The other poised on the edge of the cockpit in a familiar pose.

A single captive balloon was in the air. We had no choice, so we dived upon it full speed, the wind favouring us.

The Boches, recognising an anti-aircraft gun, fired volley after volley, but to no avail.

"If only they don't haul it in before we get there."

"They would have already done so."

"Our comrades in the trenches must be preparing an attack and the Boches are anxious to keep an eye on them as long as possible."

By repeated turns I succeeded in evading the enemy fire.

"Shall I let her go?"

"Wait a moment till I come about."

"Hurry up then, the Fokkers are climbing."

"Fire!"

"Get out your glue pots, something is going to break!"

Chignole sent over two shells.

A few seconds, then a flame ran over the surface of the captured balloon.

"The sausage is cooking!"

Suddenly the complete combustion of the mass which burned like a torch.

Chignole, standing upright in the cockpit, uttered shrieks of delight, but a rattling noise, a tac-a-tac, well known and familiar, sent the blood tingling through our veins. We had destroyed a captive balloon, but now the great question was, Should we reach our lines? Things didn't look too hopeful. Thirty yards behind us a Fokker was pumping lead into us. I attempted a desperate manœuvre. I came about suddenly. The Boche, surprised, passed us, carried on by his own speed. Chignole, taking the advantage of the situation, sent him over a few volleys which he only succeeded in escaping by diving precipitously.

On our return, compliments, felicitations, which Chignole received with dignity, a slight quivering of his nose alone betraying his delight.

The captain spared him no praise.

"A brilliant exploit! The General commanding the sector was delighted. What reward do you want? Come, make a request. We can refuse you nothing to-day."

Chignole hesitated, and then with his inimitable lisp said: "Forty-eight hours to go and see my girl."

At our mess Chignole wrote a letter with much care. It really assumed the importance

of an event, for ordinarily he disdained all correspondence.

“ Whose going to get all that gas ? ”

“ None of your business ! ”

“ Monsieur has secrets.”

Chignole raised his head, and then launched at us : “ I thought you were smarter than you are. Couldn’t you guess I was writing to my girl ? ”

I took advantage of his inattention to look over his shoulder and read : “ My dear good mother, your son will be with you to-morrow ; you can just imagine how glad I am.”

CHAPTER XI

CHIGNOLE IN PARIS

“IF it isn’t too much trouble, ‘Old Charles,’ would you mind passing me the radishes?”

In the dining car we attacked the hors d’œuvre and this was the prelude to the forty-eight hours’ leave which the destroyed sausage balloon had won for us. With us were officers of all arms and all rank, besides a few aged civilians.

“In what sector now? Where was your battery last? That was very hard. Yes, the little road; we were relieved the second day, then sent back. Sent back? . . . Poor fellow! You say both his legs? . . . As for me, I prefer to be in Champagne. That eighty-seven Austrian of theirs is too treacherous. The capture of the pill-box was no easy job. It’ll all be over some day. A little fine weather and we’ll begin again. Come into our mess some morning. Never any doubt about victory.”

My companion was blissfully absorbed in contemplating the telegraph poles. Many trains passed us laden with artillery of every description, all hidden beneath heavy linen covers. The countryside was wet and deserted, the only thing that lent the slightest animation being a long grey line of motor trucks that zigzagged on the white roadway.

"This dining car is not half bad. But, between you and me, it lacks ladies."

"All war lacks ladies."

Chignole had begun the journey as a very proper young man lost in illustrated magazines, but from hour to hour a kind of fever seemed to come over him, and the luncheon begun most composedly ended less calmly.

"What time is it by your watch?"

"Two o'clock."

"You're slow. It can't be possible. Is this train only crawling? What an old plug!"

In spite of the cold and the timid protest of his neighbours, he lowered the window. His head hanging out for a long time, he inhaled the air like a perfume.

"Ah! It begins to smell like Paris. I can't remain seated any longer." And abandoning his dessert, his serviette, and the car, he disappeared.



Monsieur Bassinet of the Parisian Cab Company



I found him in the passageway holding forth in the midst of a group of obliging listeners.

“ Fifty miles an hour ? You’re dreaming ! It’s a regular handcart, or else it’s got rheumatism. Do you suppose the engineer has any real reason for not wanting us to arrive on time ? ”

Along the track villas could now be seen standing closer together ; gardens carefully raked, pools in artificial rock, globes of coloured glass like children’s balloons.

Chignole uttered a cry.

“ I see it. That’s it. There it is. The *Sacré Cœur* ! The butte ! The butte ! ”

And I had the greatest difficulty in the world to persuade him that it was quite useless to go and stand on the last step and wait.

The station. Confusion ; a friend was waiting for me at the exit ; delicate, stylish and in her grey dress. I recognised her at once among a thousand ; a faithful friend, my torpedo with its joyful purr.

“ Get in. Where do you want me to drop you ? ”

“ No, it’s not worth while, ‘ Old Charles.’ I prefer to take the subway. If your car is your friend, the subway is mine. Seven o’clock

this evening without fail. You know what we have arranged."

"All right. Seven on the dot."

Chignole had made me promise to dine with him. I confess I immediately accepted his invitation. I was curious to see his home and especially his mother, who is a little "My mother" too. Is not Chignole my brother since our separate blood will unite some day in death? Some day of battle, or some day should we fall?"

The city was discreetly lighted; the sidewalks shone, for it had been raining. At the corner of one of the streets stood a push-cart laden with violets and mimosa, lighted by a candle whose flame quivered beneath a paper shade.

A warm breeze permeated us. One could smell the odour of hothouses and factories, flowers and cooking, luxury and misery.

A few errands and then I climbed to the Butte.

At the threshold of the house as I jumped from my car, a stout woman with a cheerful manner greeted me with a cordiality not devoid of a certain respect.

"Surely, you are Arthur's boss. The boss of our Chignole as we all call him."

I had a disagreeable impression. It was not thus that I had imagined his mother. The woman continued,

“ I am the concierge.”

“ Thank heaven.”

This escaped me in spite of myself. Anyway she did not understand.

“ Yes, I am Madame Bassinet. We’re invited to the dinner party, my daughter Sophie and Monsieur Bassinet who will soon be here. I asked him to be relieved early. I will go first and show you the way. Be careful ; the stairway is dark, on account of the coal shortage.

“ Hip-hip ! ” Chignole greeted me. At his hand-clasp I felt the joy that my presence caused him.

“ Mother, this is my boss.”

In the semi-obscurity of the hallway, I caught sight of an aureole of white hair and heard a soft voice.

“ Do come in, Monsieur, take off your things. I am glad to see you.”

“ Oh, yes, we can really say that we’ve talked about you, imagined things about you. Arthur not being much of a correspondent we were reduced to suppositions,” concluded Madame Bassinet.

Under the suspension lamp whose green shade softened the crude light, the table was set.

“Come, Sophie, come here so I can introduce you. This is my daughter, Monsieur. About the same age as your Chignole. Just a few months difference. They were brought up together; used to play in the ‘Maquis’ before it was pulled down. Those were the good old times. Our tenants were respectable and polite and clean.”

Mademoiselle Bassinet was a blonde. Her blue eyes gazed at you with a disconcerting curiosity, slightly attenuated by a roguish smile.

“She is a typewriter, a stenographer,” declared her mother solemnly with a shade of respect.

In the chimney place over a coke fire, a kettle was singing. On a shelf a photograph in a plush frame of a three-year-old Chignole, naked in an armchair, holding out his little round arms.

“Do you think it looks like me?”

“Yes, especially the moustache.”

Beside this lay a toy doll, one of whose legs was missing, a locomotive without a tender, and some lead soldiers with part of their paint scratched off.

“Don’t pay any attention to all that truck. Mother just loves bric-à-brac,” said Chignole, carefully opening the wine bottles.

“Ah ! here are our aces.”

The door was opened with a bang.

“Little daughter and the wife here ? Then let’s give her the gas as you say in aviation terms.”

Monsieur Bassinet crushed my fingers in his robust hands. In his brown coat with its large silver buttons he was probably the handsomest coachman the city cab service possessed.

We sat down. I was placed at the right of Madame Chignole. Her face was delicate, regular, singularly young, but her tired eyes betrayed wakeful nights, long vigils, hard work, and tears. She filled my plate and my glass. I don’t know why she recalled my own mother. Do not all mothers look somewhat alike ?

Chignole was saying sweet nothings in an undertone to Mademoiselle Sophie who blushed slightly. Monsieur Bassinet congested in his celluloid collar carved the leg of mutton, holding forth all the while. His wife watched him with admiration, and Mamma Chignole related to me a thousand childish and touching things.

“Do you think he will be dressed warmly

enough ? It must be so cold up there. Is he really serious ? After all he's got a very good nature. For instance, before the war he used to go out once in a while with friends, you know how it is. Well, he always returned home. Sometimes it was five o'clock in the morning, but he came home all the same. That couldn't be called staying out, could it ? And then he was so good-looking when he was little."

She shook her head, her lips murmuring several times, "When he was little," "When he was little."

And her eyes filled with tears gazed into the past come to life again.

"What if we talked a little aviation ? It would be very much to the point, I think," suggested Monsieur Bassinet, serving the salad.

"As for me, I have always been carried away by that sort of thing. Ever since I have been rolling about Paris, I have only had one accident, the only one in my career, and that was on account of the aeroplanes. It was at the beginning, at the time of the Paris-Madrid races. I was with Lolette (she's my horse) on the Place du Carrousel. An aeroplane passed; I looked up, and you could imagine, of course, I didn't lose sight of it. Well, Monsieur, I

don't know whether it was Lolette or I who did it, but we climbed on to the sidewalk, and it was Gambetta's statue that stopped us, otherwise I believe we would have entered the Louvre Galleries, all hitched ! ”

Chignole insisted on accompanying me, and we gently glided down the Rue Lepic.

“ Be careful, ‘ Old Charles,’ the pavement is slippery. Not so fast, look out for the police. This isn't the Front. I hope you were not too bored. If only you knew what pleasure you gave us.”

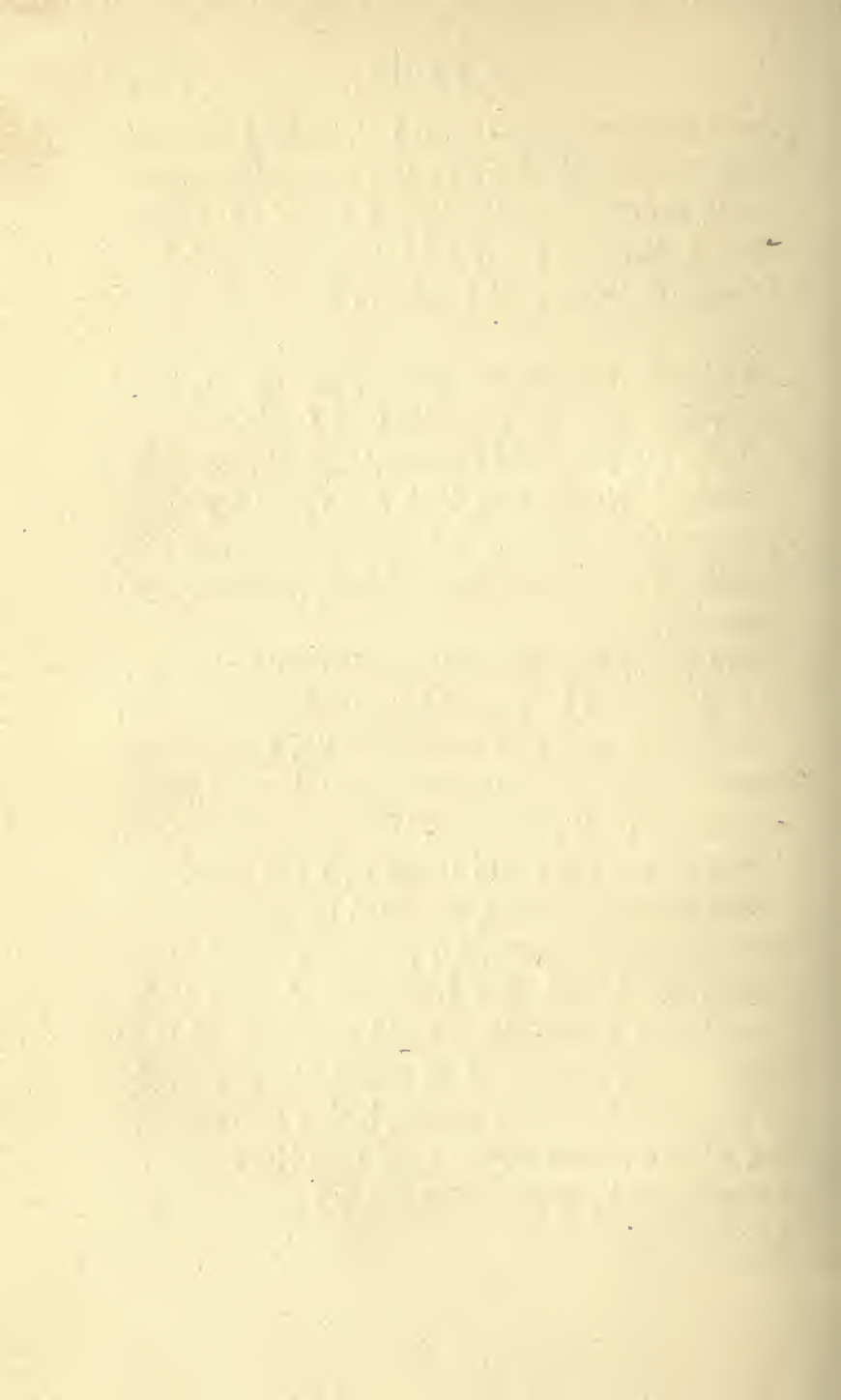
No wind, the sky was studded with stars.

“ There will be rage this evening.”

Chignole said this mechanically, from sheer force of habit. We were both thinking of what was going on “ Out there.”

“ Yes, the boys will be at it, I feel sure.”

We remained silent, troubled by finding ourselves where we were, far from our war family which we loved, far from the danger that threatened them. The tepid moisture of the sleeping city caused us to regret the dry wind of the heights, which rouses, lashes and stings. So, silently, we went forward into the night, a bit gripped by a homesickness for our wandering existence.



CHAPTER XII

CHIGNOLE GETS INTO POLITICS

My lemon-wood table glowed yellowish beneath the rays of the sinking sun. My old-fashioned doll was still a mysterious little person whose wax face defied the marks of time. Her dress of the Infanta style was stiff and gilded, and still retained the pleats which long ago it had amused me to make when laying her in her glass-covered case. The children of Poulbot were very proper in their frame, and Willette's Pierrot still continued his impossible dream.

How good it seemed to be home again ; to find one's things just where one left them. They were almost human. They seemed to know I had come back. Sh ! Don't move, it is only I, I shan't be here long, only till to-night. I needed a sniff at your familiar faces ; wanted to feel your caress.

You represent the past, *my* past of before the war. You are one of the last witnesses of

the happy moments now gone by, for you, O little home, know that you have lost friends in the fray, that many of them will never return.

But there were some whom you had jealously guarded in the library. They are immortal, I was sure of their welcome. When I used to absorb myself in their contemplation, forced myself to understand them, it seemed to me that our comprehension was reciprocal.

“Bon jour, Bataille, you are here to remind me of ‘The Beau Voyage,’ and the ‘Chambre Blanche’; and you, Michelet, what will be the first words that I shall find in the heart of your book to welcome me? ‘You are repaid, O heroes, who, in sacrificing all your dreams for your country, have said, “In times to come virgins shall weep for them.”’”

And then there were my brushes, my palette, a sketch. I was going to try to finish it; but dusk was coming on, and the artificial light might have driven away the cherished phantoms which I imagined lurking in dark corners. The couch with its disarranged cushions seemed still to bear the mark of a reclining body. I was very comfortable there while awaiting the hour of departure. Once again I wanted to

taste the marvellous poison of memories, evoked in spite of one's self, because I was alone, and it was night.

In a tavern on the Boulevard Chignole was sipping of brandy with infinite pleasure, served by the waiter in a cup in order that it might not seem what it really was. He blissfully inhaled the smoke of an immense cigar and projected it towards the ceiling in capricious circles, immensely interested in the designs they made. At the next table two gentlemen submerged in huge newspapers were commenting on the daily events.

"Not very good news. First Serbia, then Roumania. If I were in Joffre's place I would have said to Sarraïl——"

Chignole smiled at these café politics, at these saucer tactics, and stared at his neighbours. The examination evidently did not satisfy him, for he puckered up his nose disdainfully.

"Those civilians have cheek," he grumbled to himself.

One of them, round, asthmatic, perspiring, panting between each sentence, continued:

"And when will it ever end? Oh, it's so long! Those poor Poilus must be so tired."

“Tired ? ” yelled Chignole, rising suddenly and thereby upsetting cup and carafe. “Tired ? The Poilus tired ? It’s plain to see that you don’t know us. Naturally between the rear and the front there are a few miles. If we were tired, it would only be of your eternal chatterings and false reasonings. Why, you’ve got about as much sense between you as a pair of rocking horses. Tired ? Did you ever hear us complain ? Have we ever asked you to do anything for us ? No ! Not even to come out and join us. We wouldn’t have you, lot of good-for-nothings. If you’d take my advice, you’d go out and buy a pair of muzzles.”

A circle was formed. The stout gentleman was congested. He panted harder and harder. His companion, thin, dried up and pale, replied snappishly : “An aviator, naturally. You might know who it is if there is any noise to be made.”

“Noise ? That’s a good one. Perhaps it was I who began it. An honest man must sit and listen to your foolishness and say ‘Amen.’ One must digest your sour remarks without a word. Not on your life ! You must take me for a slacker instead of a Poilu ! ”

“An aviator ? ”

“ Well, perhaps the aviators are not the Poilus, but they get killed just like the others. In the mud or in the sky, in the black or in the blue, mole or bird, they’re all in it. The Poilus are tired, you say ? And you have the audacity to appear to be moved over our fate. Come, now, admit that it is with you yourselves you are sympathising. It’s for your own skins that you fear. Oh, la ! la ! you shed tears because you are no longer allowed to sip your favourite appetisers, see coarse vaudeville shows, and your dear little stomachs are afraid of the meat cards. Otherwise expressed, you are chicken livered. As to us, we have never lacked confidence. Evidently I am neither Petain, Mangin, or Nivelle, but I’m sure they would talk to you just as I have, pack of grumblers ! Yesterday you were shrieking to the Government : ‘ Go ahead, go ahead, take measures, take steps ’ ; to-day, when it obeys you, you’re afraid that Napoleon might climb down off his bronze pedestal on the Place Vendôme. Yes, we are confident. We feel that we are fighting for something great ; something that is beyond you, and that afterwards we will be able to enjoy tranquilly. All that is good ; liberty ! light ! We’re pounding the enemy in order that our Marianne

won't have to submit to their Kaiser, and Marianne is a kid worth while ! ”

Chignole's adversaries seemed sorry to be where they were, especially since the public began to murmur and seem prone to become animated with warlike dispositions.

“ And now, gentlemen, in finishing, I've just got one thing to say to the slackers in the rear, and that is : ‘ Shut up ! ’ ”

The ring of the telephone snatched me from my sleep.

“ Hello, yes, it is I. What ! The police station. I am to go to the police station. All right, at once.”

What had happened ? On the way I allowed my imagination to work, piling up improbable occurrences. The station. The stairway was crowded with men and women in a great state of agitation.

“ If they don't let him go at once, we'll smash everything ! The youngster is right. It was a good lesson for them.”

I made myself known to an employé, who ushered me immediately into the office, where I came face to face with a much excited Chignole, over whose left eye they were trying vainly to put a bandage.

“The café,” he murmured. “Discussion with a couple of rotters. The crowd took my side and wanted to lick ’em. I stepped between so they wouldn’t be too jarred and, of course, got the blow that was meant for them. No gas left in my tanks.”

The Commissary was a good fellow. He had an undissimulated weakness for the aviation corps. I even believe he shared in my friend’s indignation against the sinister gossipers.

“That’s all right, Monsieur Chignole. Now that your pilot’s come, you may go with him. Hoping to have the pleasure of a meeting the next time you bring down a sausage——”

Chignole, calmed by this time, took both the Commissary’s hands and, a trifle embarrassed with his naïve smile, said: “Ah, you at least have understood me. You’re the right stuff. You, at least, are not angry with me, even if I did walk on their corns!”

We went out by a side door. The crowd in the staircase meanwhile demanded him more than audibly. We just had time to reach the station and catch the express train which was to carry us back “Out there.”

“What can you expect, ‘Old Charles’?”

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Might just as well laugh over it." And pointing to the bandage on his head: "After twenty-three months at the front, I had to come back to the rear to get wounded. Such jokes only happen to Chignole."

CHAPTER XIII

CHIGNOLE TAKES A HEADER

“MACHINE V 967 will be on guard this afternoon at Pont St. Vincent from two o'clock till dusk.”

“Great! There will be plenty of time to lunch beforehand,” said Chignole.

For two days several machines of our group had been specially detailed to protect the very important factories which comprised this small city, and against which the Aviatiks had been particularly relentless, quite ineffectually, however.

My passenger and I were on the ground at the appointed time. A slight breeze came from the east, but did not succeed in dispersing the clouds which spread out in long scarfs over an anæmic blue sky.

“There's no getting around it, this certainly is winter. We ought to take a furnace up there with us.”

“How would you like a bar two thousand

yards long and a cocktail ? ” The noise of our motor interrupted this dialogue, and it was the usual fever of departure. A rapid glance at the machine, a few instructions to Racine, and soon we were between fifteen hundred and two thousand metres altitude, going and coming between Nancy and Pont St. Vincent.

The first hour passed quickly. We exchanged a few impressions.

“ Look at the station. There’s a train. I’ll bet it’s going to Paris.”

“ The lucky dog ! ”

“ I can see the time by the cathedral clock.”

“ Congratulations on your sight.”

“ Thanks for the sight.”

The second time we made our tour was not so amusing. It grew tiresome making eternal spirals, mounting or descending.

“ Gee, but it’s cold. My feet are numb.”

“ Hand ’em over and I’ll put them in my pockets and warm ’em for you.”

“ Think you’re smart, don’t you ? ”

“ What about going down for tea ? ”

“ You never think of anything but drinking.”

“ And you never think of anything but scolding.”

“ The fog is rising ! I’m going to resign.”

Little by little the earth became less distinct, faded away, assumed the appearance of fluidity. We had the impression that we would never see it again and we felt very much alone, lost.

“No Aviatiks for to-day.”

“What do you know about it?”

“Those gentlemen will have remained by their fireside, afraid of the cold.”

“Afraid of the wind, I should say.”

The breeze, increasing, carried us on; in the haze I could not direct my course except by my judgment, and it was hard work, for the old machine began to pitch. Although I did all I could to hold our course against the wind, incontestably we were being borne far from our landing, and in a direction difficult to determine quite exactly.

The minutes passed, waiting for a ray of light; but the fog, instead of rising, thickened with the coming night.

“Only ten quarts of gasolene, ‘Old Charles.’ It is about time to go and see what’s happening down below.”

There was no choice. We must descend. I reduced the motor to one hundred and plunged. In fine weather there is nothing more amusing in the world than taking a graceful header

downward, feeling the earth growing nearer and nearer, becoming more and more visible, in fact, almost drawing you towards her. But to-day it was a dive in the dark which strangely resembles a plunge into a foul and miry abyss.

Six hundred yards. Still night. I slowed down the motor to hover longer. Seven hundred and fifty revolutions.

“Just our luck. Who would have believed it when we started?”

“Do you see anything?”

“No. Like Sister Anne, I can see nothing in sight.”

“How long do you suppose this damn thing is going to last?”

Five hundred yards, and still the same impenetrable veil.

The gasolene was going. In five minutes it was likely that we should pass into the other world, so to speak. My imperturbable companion, however, was whistling a popular tune. His courage was contagious and bucked up mine a bit.

A sudden turn of the motor, several misses, fugitive recoveries, the propeller stopped turning. Then turned very fast, then blocked!

“We’ve pancaked!”

“Stalled for good. Tableau!”

“If it’s trouble we came out for, we’ve got it all right.”

I worked the levers quickly, but without result. The machine, deprived of speed, made a quick dive for about a hundred yards. Land!

The veil was rent asunder, and before us that sombre mass of undetermined colour was land indeed. I examined it at a glance. Anything but a good spot for landing. Woods, a canal, a state road, a ravine, a rocky field cut by hedges. No dream.

“Take the field.”

“Nothing else to do.”

“Think we can make it?”

“We can only try.”

The motor having stopped, we could detect the slightest noise. The wind whistled in the radiators and made the cables groan. I tightened the wheel almost to breaking, and my feet were glued to the rudder bar. Earth grew nearer and nearer with giddy rapidity. A sensation as of crushing. Of Chignole I could only see his hand clutching the edge of the cockpit. Oh, the meaning in those hands which gripped convulsively as though grasping on to life! How much we wanted to live at that moment when we were so near death.

A kind of prayer rose to my lips, a sort of last entreaty.

I skimmed over the edges of the trees. Our time had come, it was now or never.

“All aboard for the hospital.”

“Unstrap yourself.”

“I have.”

I touched ground at the speed of more than sixty miles an hour, back pedalled. The machine obeyed, rebounded on its back wheels. The ravine and the road were crossed.

“By a hair ! ”

The same manœuvre, but on account of the loss of speed, the levers did not reply so well and we just made the canal.

“A little more and we would have played ducks ! ”

We approached the field at a quick rate.

“Look out for the hedge ! ”

“The darn thing thinks this is the Auteuil steeplechase ! ”

We lunged ahead. Our front wheels being jammed to a pulp, the body of the machine tipped forward. She was going to turn turtle. Chignole, projected by the shock, plunged over my head like a bullet. I tried to follow suit, managed to get half way out of the cockpit, but not sufficiently far to prevent the machine

from falling on me, flattening me on the ground like a worm.

A sudden blow, a flash of pain, a suffocating feeling, every movement impeded, then oblivion followed by a terrible anguish. My friend! Badly injured, dying perhaps. Suddenly I heard his voice.

“Are you hurt? Tell me.”

“I am stifling! Get me out from here!”

“Don’t move.”

I could hear him struggling. With his rifle he made himself a lever to pry up the heavy pieces.

“It won’t be anything if you’ll just keep quiet.”

I could hear him panting. He spared no efforts. The desire to release me from the vice which was strangling me doubled his strength.

“Here comes some Poilus, thank God! Quick, quick,” he yelled. “Over here, lend a hand. Up now! One, two, all together!”

The bulk of the machine shook, raised and tipped to one side. They pulled me out by my feet. Chignole felt me all over, rubbed me.

“Nothing broken, old fellow, it won’t be anything!”

“And you?”

“Nothing the matter with me. Luck’s on my side. Landed on my head, but my helmet got it all.”

A peasant woman hastened towards us with a bottle in hand. I felt better already, a good night’s sleep, a little massage and to-morrow all would be forgotten.

We allowed ourselves to be led by the witnesses of the accident to a neighbouring village, but first we remained to contemplate the heap of canvas, cables, and scrap iron which had once been our bird of combat.

During the few months that we had mounted it, it had been our faithful companion, never failing us day or night; it had permitted our sowing panic in enemy cities by just and necessary reprisals. That quivering mass which, in spite of many a touch, the Boches had never been able to bring down, had come to grief on French soil, victim of a banal accident due merely to fog, perhaps ill luck. On leaving it, it seemed to us as though a little of our souls would remain for ever in that broken carcass, and we wept, yes, dropped a real tear for our great dead bird.

CHAPTER XIV

CHIGNOLE THINKS HE IS AT WATERLOO

ON the first favourable day we were to attempt a bombardment on the factories of one of the most important centres of the Badische-Anilin.

This raid constituted, round trip, about four hundred and fifty miles. It had been especially entrusted to our little squadron with alluring promises in case of success. We were very proud of the honour bestowed upon us, and the preparations went forward with ardour.

Chignole, in a state of extreme agitation, examined the motor to which we were going to entrust our fortunes. Dressed for his work, his sleeves rolled up, his hands soiled with oil and filth, his eyes strained, his brows knit together, his nose quivering, he overwhelmed Racine with instructions.

“ Didn’t I say not to replace the worn parts by new ones? You never can tell what the new ones are worth, idiot. Will they hold?

God only knows. I want pieces that have already worked."

"But the sergeant mechanic gave me——"

"Damn the sergeant mechanic! Has he got anything to do with my machine?" cried Chignole, raising his arms toward the sky. "Is it his portrait that is going to be spoiled if we have a breakdown? Is it he who will have to eat the K. K. bread? Tell me, is it he who will have to eat it?"

The paroxysm over, he added: "Will you please place two chamois skins over the tank after you have filled it. And if there is a single drop of water in the gasolene I don't know what will happen to you. But you can count on me, it will be done up brown."

And Racine, in his simple imagination, saw visions of terrifying systems of torture.

On the map my comrade had traced our itinerary with a firm blue line. He had carefully dotted the position of certain batteries that were to be avoided. He had dismounted the machine-gun, and oiled every part. Remounted it with the care of a watchmaker, and tested it at the rifle range.

At length our pocket flasks were filled; that is to say, we were ready.

“Are you going to take your snails?”

“No, Monsieur, no,” he replied, rather coldly; for he did not like to joke when preparing for serious business. “No, Monsieur, my thoroughbreds are asleep. Like turtles, opossum, and other wise people, they only live six months a year.”

The barometer kept going up regularly, the wind blew from the east, but faintly, however. That evening the captain left us chuckling and rubbing his hands.

“To-morrow is the day, my children. Don’t play cards too late; be on hand to-morrow morning at five.”

At last.

Chignole heaved a sigh of relief and abandoned his gruff manner, free to assume it, if our departure were postponed.

We were ready long before daylight. On trial our motor turned marvellously.

“Now, then, mon petit Racine, shall we pull it off all right?”

Racine was pale. He felt the moral responsibility weighing on his shoulders. He turned towards us his big, soft eyes, in which the tears were ready to spring, and said, simply: “I’ve done all I could. You can count on that.”

The planes rose at intervals of a few seconds, lifting into the coming day like great birds, drying their wings damp with dew in the first rays of the morning sun.

“ We cannot say that we’re exactly lazy.”

We mounted high, going towards the Vosges. The sharp cold made the atmosphere absolutely limpid.

“ Are you warm enough ? ”

“ Never fear, I put on two sweaters.”

“ Here, stuff this cookie into your mouth, so you shan’t have opened it for nothing.”

The first branches of the mountain chain were white with snow. Our planes grouped together and headed directly for Alsace. We had carefully chosen the place where we were to cross the lines and were cannonaded but little.

“ They’re reserving it for our return.”

Chignole looked at the Alsatian countryside with admiration.

“ Oh, the pig-headed brutes ! They offered themselves a handsome slice when they took that country from us. But it must be returned, do you hear ? ” And from the height of three thousand yards he threatened the savages with his fist.

At the horizon a shining line became visible, broadened out as we advanced. The Rhine.

“The Rhine?”

Chignole instinctively saluted it in true military fashion, and then, after a moment's reflection, observed: “Well, ‘Old Charles,’ it's as beautiful as the Seine, and the Seine for yours truly is the best ever.”

We had only to follow it, our objective being situated on its bank.

“No Fokkers?”

“No. But on our return I have an idea there'll be a whole bunch of them. A regular barrage, something worthy of the name.”

In the distance a thick cloud of smoke betrayed the factory. On the river the boats were like children's playthings.

“You will please drop your pellets right in the middle of the building.”

One eye on the sighting tube, Chignole awaited the favourable moment. Several of our planes had already gotten in their work, for on the land yellowish discharges marked the explosions with the commencement of fires.

Our turn. He released the bombs one by one.

“I'm not hurrying, it makes the pleasure last longer.”

We had separated from the other planes so

as not to hinder each other in firing. Now we grouped together again and turned about.

"Don't go to sleep, it's getting warm."

Telephone and telegraph had been operated to advantage. German shells began to rain about us so that we were obliged to separate again in order to offer smaller and more unstable targets.

"Listen to the motor."

"It's running all right, isn't it?"

"It's lowered a hundred revolutions."

"Joking aside?"

"It's no joke. It's just as I tell you."

I modified the carburettor without bettering the management. The hand continued to indicate the drop.

"Perhaps the indicator's out of order."

"No, we're not advancing. Look, we are far behind; the other fellows are outdistancing us. Send out the rescue signal."

"Are you crazy? Ask for help, not on your life. What for? What could they do? Bah! we don't need any one."

"Thank you for the lesson, Monsieur Chignole."

The planes, widely dispersed, became gradually indistinct in the distance, and the sudden impression of solitude came over us. We were

alone. This last impression was purely figurative, for several black crosses (Fokkers) were rapidly mounting to keep us company. Their ascension disturbed us but little, the fall of the motor was far more agonising.

“Oil flowing regularly, radiators normally warm, it must be a ball bearing which is out of order.”

The Vosges are there, very near us. Suddenly the hand fell five hundred revolutions, became motionless for a few seconds, and then dropped to zero. The propeller whirled listlessly and then blocked.

“How many kilometres to the trenches?”

“About twenty-five.”

Our altitude was about two thousand six hundred metres. Our biplane soars about ten times its own height.

“We ought to make it.”

“We will, but in the meantime I’m taking a few precautions.”

Chignole proceeded to tear up his map and then, detaching his machine-gun and his rifle into separate pieces, threw them overboard. We passed the summit of the Vosges just grazing the pine trees.

“The worst is over. Now we can let ourselves glide.”

But in proportion to our descent, the firing of our adversaries became hotter.

"Can you see our lines?"

"Not a thing. Oh, the swine, what a cannonade! They don't care a whack about the expense. What rotten shots they are."

"Give in, give in," rattled the machine-gun.

"You'll have to get up early to catch us. Courage, old fellow, I can see our trenches. Yes, really see them."

"Surrender, surrender," whistled the bullets.

"Chignole may die, but never comes to earth."

"Surrender, surrender," groaned the cannons.

The soul of Cambronne seemed to come to life in the Parisian urchin. He must act, for he can no longer find vent for his feelings in words. He felt the necessity of a gesture which would baffle the adversary and disarm death; so, standing upright on his seat, he heroically spat upon the enemy.

CHAPTER XV

CHIGNOLE IS SAD

AT fifty yards above the lines, we were exactly in the position of a clay pigeon on whom the sportsmen have turned their rifles.

"We're on our side. Thank God!"

"Do you really think we are? We're being peppered from in front." And I showed him the tip of one of the wings which had just been cut into by a rain of shot.

"Our own batteries firing on us! Well, that's the limit."

"Good things never come singly."

The ground marked by shell holes resembled a relief map of the moon with the mountain and craters.

"Just wait till you see the way we land."

"You should worry. No barbed wire, let's be thankful for that."

"Hold on tight."

"I am gripping the banister. The stairs are slippery."

At five yards above ground I came about ; the machine tipped from side to side, slipped a little on its tail, touched, rebounded, and a little further on settled itself, after having jammed all landing apparatus. The cannon-ading redoubled in intensity. The shots wove an invisible network which seemed to draw its impalpable woof about us.

Waiting would be useless under the circumstances. So, snatching the compass and the altimeter, we ran towards the trenches which we merely guessed at by the undulation of their parapets. But at the end of twenty feet we found ourselves caught in a barrage fire. There was nothing to do but let the storm pass. So we fairly fell into a shell hole that was half filled with water. After having been eagles it was rather vexing to become ducks. We seemed doomed to experience everything in this war.

Relatively sheltered, we began to take in our actual situation. We had landed between the lines at the border of a hill. Beneath and behind us were the French trenches. The crest of the hill often taken and retaken now belongs to no one. The Boches are on the other side.

“ They can’t see us.”

“ Good.”

“ Naturally this spot is well located. Lie flat on the ground. When they’ll have got through wasting munitions, we’ll burn up the ‘ Cuckoo ’ and walk home. In the meantime, pass me a cigarette.”

Unfortunately my cigarette case was wet, for we were standing in water almost up to our waists.

“ We ought to consider ourselves very fortunate. All we’ve got to do is to come right down out of the sky and get a bath. All the comforts of home.”

“ Yes, but when it gets to be dinner time, we’ll sing a different tune.”

“ Nothing to be done, however, before dark.”

Was it the shock due to the emotions experienced, that cold which overcame us imperceptibly, seemed to swallow us up ? Involuntarily, without even wishing it, we suddenly fell asleep in spite of the noise of the explosion, without ever asking ourselves whether or not we should ever awake.

A light blinded me.

“ Are you hurt ? ”

It was night. I was still in the mud. Kneeling near me were shadows which pointed a lantern into my face.

"What the devil's the matter? Can't you let a fellow alone when he's asleep?"

Chignole opened his eyes without knowing where he was.

"Hello, there's some one here."

The Lieutenant, head of a scouting party, explained.

"You had us all scared to death. We thought you were dead. I've brought the stretchers, the doctor and the confessor.

"Very delicate attentions, and we appreciate them, but you would have done better to have held off your fire while we were struggling up there."

"Do you mean to say you didn't see the Fokker that stuck to you like a leech. We tried our best to help you. Even the artillery got into the game."

"A Fokker? Well, upon my soul! All the honours for us. How nice of you to come! Thank you, Father, but your prayers for the dying will have to be postponed."

Chignole introduced himself, introduced me, shook hands with everybody, and joked generally.

"Let's hurry a bit," interrupted the Lieutenant.

"How about the 'Taxi'?"

“The Boches seem to be quiet. I will send out a crew to take it to pieces to-night. If the Boches locate them and make our work impossible, we'll smash it to pieces with a shot from a '75 early in the morning.”

Climbing Indian file, we headed towards our trenches. At times the pale light of a fuse illuminated our passage; then, flattened out, our noses to the ground, we would wait for the obscurity which would save us. As we followed through the trenches, I was carried back two years to the time when I was their daily guest. We passed a fatigue squad which was silently mounting with pickets, barbed wire and cords. We brushed against shapeless heaps covered with tenting. A groan escaped from some of them. They were men, asleep.

A village with tumble-down, crumbling houses. One of them without a roof. We stumbled down a rickety staircase into its cellar.

“This is our mess. The cook is at your service. I'm sorry, but the two bales of straw in the corner is all I have to offer you. Don't worry, your squadron has been informed. I wish you a pleasant meal and good night.”

We did honour to the frugal meal. Then, stretched out in the straw, we awaited the

coming of Morpheus, whose clasp was singularly painful to our aching limbs, which caused my companion to say : " After all, ' Old Charles,' the Infantry is no cinch."

Early the next day, the squad car came for us, carrying us to our post in less than an hour. Effusions, explanations with the captain, reports, telephone calls to the chief of staff, compliments. At last we made our way towards our tent for necessary ablutions, where we met Racine, whose face brightened with pleasure at seeing us again. But Chignole went at him like a madman.

" You've got cheek to show yourself ! It isn't your fault that we are alive. Naturally, the motor pancaked."

" I did all I could."

" Well, that wasn't much, I can tell you. A little more and the daisies would be growing over us next Spring. Mechanics like you are good for breaking people's necks, and that's all."

I tried to interpose, but he continued aggressively :

" You're a bluff mechanic, a failure ! A peasant like you is only good behind a plough, and that's where you ought to be ! "

" I didn't work in the fields, I was a blacksmith,"

“ A blacksmith ! ” Chignole stamped his foot. “ A blacksmith ! he calls that a mechanician. Either you’re crazy or in love. Don’t look at me like that ! I’m not a passing train.”

A signal bomb rent the air. The Germans.

A dozen or more enemy planes hove into sight. The baby Nieuports lifted to bar their passage.

We rushed towards our shelters and crowded in, exchanging a thousand foolish remarks on the way. Through the observation holes we could follow the events of the bombardment. The Boches were flying low over our heads ; we could hear the significant whizzing as the shells rained downward.

“ Who’s the idiot standing out there ? ”

It was Racine, who, doubtless downcast on account of Chignole’s upbraiding, had thoughtlessly remained in the open.

“ Racine ! Racine ! ” we yelled.

Chignole and I looked at each other. My heart almost stopped beating.

Our comrades uttered a cry. A bomb had just exploded near the tree against which he was leaning. The smoke enveloped him. When it rose Racine was lying motionless.

We all made a wild dash forward, Chignole leading. He raised the unfortunate fellow,

holding him right in his arms. The blood was streaming from his collar, from everywhere. Chignole, wild eyed, stood aghast at his scarlet hands.

Do not expect your son, O aged parents, back there, bent over the furrows? He will never again see the calm fields of his beloved Beauce. He will never again hear the sound of the belfry clock nor know the joy of his forge, his anvil, or the hammer that made the sparks fly. Gone for ever are those warm evenings when seated on your doorstep he helped you braid the cords to tie the sheaves. Gone those Sundays when he left for town dressed in his new blue blouse.

Earth has claimed him for her own; the earth of the east that is hard and dry. But there are within her infinite and mysterious ramifications, so that your soil, too, will be rendered fertile by his blood.

Your waiting shall be vain. Your son will never come back.



The Fokker stuck to you like a leech



CHAPTER XVI

CHIGNOLE GETS HIS BOCHES

"HERE's the hat juice ! "

" What ? Where ? "

I awoke with a start. It was Hilaire, nicknamed Sirotin, our cook, who, with one hand held an electric lamp and with the other a bowl of steaming coffee.

" You were asleep. It was a pleasure to see you, but it was necessary to shake you up since you take on guard duty at dawn."

" How's the weather ? "

" Fine ! It's been freezing all night, I fixed you up a coffee that's worth while. Something in it to keep your insides warm."

Sirotin, as his name revealed, had a rather pronounced taste for strong drink. As soon as ever he speaks, the words ' Gnole, Cric, dur, raide,' which are slang for alcohol of all kinds, come spontaneously to his lips with the expressions, ' Filled to the brim, etc.' He discussed at length the relative merits of different grape

and plum brandies, and this pure-blooded Norman, when he would utter the word 'Pur pomme' (pure juice) was almost pathetic.

"There was a certain Calpadós, an apple-jack of 1893——" and the sentence would end with a significant smack of the tongue.

As a civilian, he fulfilled the necessary function of grave digger, and the accessory of wine dealer, in a joyful village in the country of Corneville. And I often wonder by what means he succeeded in obtaining the position of cook in our mess. Mystery, administration and pull more than likely, for this situation is much sought after; indeed, the holder of this title would never face any other fire than that of his own cook stove.

"Where is Chignole?"

"On the grounds, near the machine."

I swallowed my coffee, lighted a candle and dressed noiselessly in order not to disturb my sleeping companions.

The grass of the plateau, hardened by the cold, cracked under my feet. Each majestic pine, powdered with snow, with its aigrettes of frost, seemed like a gigantic Christmas tree, It was no longer dark and yet the stars were still shining in the pale sky. We seemed to be guided by a light which seemed to come from

an invisible source. The shed was open, my bi-plane outside. The mechanics, with their mufflers and bonnets pulled down over their ears, were bustling around it, only interrupting their work to blow their fingers, benumbed with cold. Seated on a gasoline tank, Chignole, dressed for flight, was busy with a pair of pinchers giving a shape to some wire which he was twisting and pulling.

“ I suppose you wonder what I am doing ? ”

“ Of course, so early at work.”

“ Well, ‘ Old Charles,’ I’ll tell you. I am making a model for a muzzle.”

“ Have you adopted another dog ? ”

“ No, since poor old Boudou left us it’s finished. This muzzle is for my snails.”

“ Your snails ? ”

“ Yes, you’ll see in a minute. The heat in the kitchen deceives them about the season. They think that Spring is already singing, so out they come, and it’s really most unhealthy for them. They might get congestion of the lungs. You can readily see that my entries to the annual races might be compromised. I have therefore, decided to muzzle them, so they will be absolutely obliged to live in their shells.”

Scarf-like rose-coloured clouds floated in the calm air, the crest of the near-by mountains

emerged from the clouds which still covered the depths ; one by one the stars went out and the crescent moon disappeared in the blue.

All ready. The mechanics let go the propeller, but the motor refused to start.

“ Did you put some glycerine in the radiator ? If you haven’t, look out for yourselves. You’ll get it, and from me, too.”

I couldn’t help thinking of Racine, who would have been so happy to be bullied thus.

“ It coughed ! Did you hear it ! It’ll be all right.”

There was an explosion, the propeller turned a few times and then stopped.

“ Put some gas in the cylinders with a syringe and get a move on ! We ought to be up there already.”

We mounted in the cold, the wind striking our faces like a thousand pin-pricks. The sun lifted the fog, but our sighting propensities were made no easier.

“ A comrade.”

In the distance a black point.

“ Don’t be so sure. Be careful.”

“ Don’t worry, old fellow. My eyes are glued on him.”

Chignole adjusted his glasses, and after a

thorough examination, announced that it was a neighbour, a friend, from a neighbouring squadron.

We continued in the direction of the lines, going gradually nearer to the other machine, which, already above them, did not venture to cross.

"Humph! Our friend doesn't seem to care about going any further. Must be cloudy weather on the other side."

We gained upon it. My companion was not mistaken, it was indeed a brother.

"The trip will be less monotonous."

We were between two clouds, where the snow was falling. Not a gap. The sun plunged its rays and made a pearl of each flake. Chignole, generally indifferent to the beauties of nature, remained open-mouthed with admiration.

"That, 'Old Charles,' is better than any vaudeville show I ever saw. Better even than the movies." And then, suddenly jumping towards our machine-gun, "Dive! Dive!" he yelled.

From a higher floating cloud, five enemies in ambush fell upon our comrade at the moment, when, without seeing them, he was passing beneath them. They attacked from

the rear. Recovering from his surprise, he faced them. Chignole began firing, but at the end of a few shots was obliged to cease. We were risking bringing down our friend, so close were the Boches pressing about him. Suddenly a flame leapt up.

“ Oh, damn them ! They’ve punctured his reservoir.” The enemy planes spread out in a fan shape to let the burning avion fall, followed by a long black tuft.

“ Poor fellows ! Poor old fellows ! ”

Trembling, powerless with rage, we forced back our tears. From the burning aerolite two forms detached themselves.

“ They didn’t want to be carbonised.”

Oh, the horror of those precipitated bodies, the dizzy whirling, their long fall ! Oh, so long ! A nightmare vision with the sensation of what their arrival on land would be, their final appearance.

The tac-a-tac-tac of a machine-gun freed us from such thoughts. The Boches were now moving in a semi-circle, which they hoped to close about us.

“ Shall we go into them ? ”

“ No foolishness. It’s useless and you know it. They’re far too many for us. Let’s skedaddle ! ”

I dived full speed, veering from side to side. Fortunately we found ourselves going towards the sun. Our enemies were dazzled by the light, while Chignole, who turned his back on them, could shoot with precision and thus protect our retreat.

They did not persist long. Being within our lines, they must have apprehended the arrival of a Nieuport.

"Band of cowards," he yelled to them, while winding off his last roll.

"Oh! It can't be possible. Here comes another." And he pointed out to me an avion which seemed headed in our direction.

"They're as numerous as lice!"

"But this one is coming from home."

"Some pirate out roving."

"It's a queer shape. I haven't seen any like that."

"A new model of some kind. You know, old fellow, I don't think I will let it approach. It's wiser not."

He put a new roll of cartridges into his gun and at eight hundred yards began firing.

"He's quitting, by gosh! Just look at him. Hold on there, wait until I get a whack at you!"

Chignole continued firing while his adversary hastened his descent.

"There, he's done for. We've got him! He prefers alighting. All that remains is to pluck him like a rose."

I halted our dive at about a hundred yards, the ground being unsatisfactory for alighting in this sector. But we saw the Boche land very clearly.

"Nothing to fear. They'll catch him down below. That corner's just stuffed with Poi-lus."

We were still rolling towards the shed when Chignole, hanging on to the cockpit, fairly shrieked with delight: "I've got one! I've got my Boche, no one can doubt it."

The whole squad wild with enthusiasm jumped into their cars and Chignole guided them towards the designated place.

We arrived to find a crowd already gathered around the machine.

"There they are, over there. What did I tell you?"

And his hand on his hip, pompous, solemn, with a royal tone he commanded, "Have my prisoners advance!"



From the burning aerolite two
forms detached themselves

CHAPTER XVII

CHIGNOLE RECEIVES A VISIT

“YES, or no? Will you keep that pose?”

“My foot’s asleep.”

“If you continue to move around all the time, how on earth do you expect me to paint the many expressions of your unforgettable nose?”

After luncheon, our friend C. was trying to catch on canvas the celebrated features of Chignole. Song of a portrait painter for millionaires, himself a landscape painter, he outlined the silhouette of my observer before placing it in our portrait gallery, which poor old de Losques began.

“Remain still, or I’ll make you swallow a tube of Prussian blue.”

“Oh, la, la! Let’s hope your governor doesn’t treat his customers like you do. Otherwise they’d soon have enough of it, especially the Americans.”

Sirotin circulated in our midst, laden with

bottles bearing many coloured labels. With his inimitable bearing of ex-wine-merchant he proposed in his moist voice, "What will it be, gentlemen?"

The door opened: entered one of the territorials who guard our plateau.

"The aviator Chignole, if you please."

"Present."

"A civilian wants to see you."

"Send him in to me."

"All right, but there's a bit of difficulty—on account of a young lady who is with him. And orders are orders. I can tell you all the same that she's mighty good-looking, no flies on her."

Chignole rose, stuck his hands into his pockets, his cigarette in equilibrium on the lower lip, scowled and rumped the end of his nose defiantly.

"That's all right. That's all right. This seems to be the day for jokes; I remained seated an hour under the pretext that my mug was being drawn, and still they continue to make fun of me, want to play another joke. This is the top stroke. All right, all right. One day isn't enough for you gentlemen now. You want to play a whole company of jokes on Chignole."

“Not a company of jokes, a company of carriages ! ”

Monsieur Bassinet had just appeared in the door.

“Bassinnet ! From the Parisian cab company, at your service, gentlemen. This is indeed an honour. Chignole, come to my arms.”

And in a vehement hug he clasped our astonished friend to his bosom.

“Something of a surprise, boy, hum ? What do you think about it ? We began to long for you as time went on ; and besides, you only sent news of yourself in drops, like the Communiqué. Therefore, I made a decision. I said to Madame Bassinet and to your mother, who by the way is very well, I said, ‘ Since the front can’t come to the rear, the rear must go to the front ’ ; consequently, putting words to action, I came with the little daughter. We took the express from Nancy, and here we are ! ”

“ Sophie is here ? ” gasped Chignole, his eyes lighting up.

“ Well, what do you think of that ? He doesn’t even ask whether I had a pleasant trip, or if Paris is still holding out, but immediately it is if the little daughter is here. Ah, youth, youth ! Yes, she’s there. Only the sentinels

have prevented her from entering. But I was so crazy to see you that I left her outside."

We did everything possible to receive our guest as he deserved, and while I made the introductions, Chignole disappeared, rushing towards a destination not difficult to guess.

In the evening at a hotel in Nancy, we were all united around a table over which Monsieur Bassinet presided with authority and urbanity.

"Ah, Messieurs les aviateurs, what a day for me! Just imagine that since I went to Auvergne to marry Madame Bassinet and to bring her back with me, I had never left the capital, except for the races extra-moros. Imagine what Lolotte, my beast, must be saying at not seeing me in the stable to-day. On what a day! I have not seen you fly on account of the weather, I have examined your birds at close range, I have lived in your mess, and been photographed in a bi-plane. Oh, if I were only twenty and not so stout!"

Chignole and Sophie isolated themselves from the conversation to live in a world by themselves, far from us, where beribboned cupids posed themselves on wreaths of orange blossoms. Their heads were gradually drawn together by a sort of mutual attraction and the young girl's blonde curls brushed against my

friend's lips. Monsieur Bassinet was only at the beginning. His eyes moist with emotion and pleasant digestion, he continued, "My unlucky generation has had the misfortune of being born between two wars. Too young for one, too old for the other. Moreover, my wife has only given me a daughter and I regret it."

I felt sure that Chignole did not regret it at all.

"I have Lolotte, of course, but they have not requisitioned her. She also is too old to serve her country." And his deep born sigh seemed to contain a sort of neighing.

The alarm whistle. The Boches!

"What, what?"

"The Boches, Monsieur Bassinet."

"So much the better. The fate is now complete. I am going to see them again as in Paris in August, 1914, but this time they will not get so far. Plug it into them, the dirty beggars."

A clarion sounded without, Sorotin rushed in out of breath, "German planes signalled! Every one ordered to the plateau. The 'Cuckoos' are ready. Car below waiting."

"Go to it, gentlemen, don't let me keep you."

Standing, leaning on the shoulder of his daughter, furtively drying a tear, Monsieur Bassinet did not lack a certain dignity. He

listened to us tumble downstairs four steps at a time, white with rage, and murmuring through his teeth, "Twenty years—only twenty years less!" Then with his large hand caressing Sophie's cheek, "Don't worry, little daughter, they won't hurt him. They won't hurt your Chignole."

A thousand yards. The snow, night, not a star, not a light.

"They really are vicious to come over Nancy such a night."

"Have you got our direction?"

"Can't be done, 'Old Charles,' no wind; nothing left but the compass and the watch."

Wheel in hand I listened to the motor. From time to time Chignole passed a handkerchief over my glasses to wipe off the flakes which dropped there.

"Once over Metz, don't waste any time. Mission of reprisals. That's proper everywhere."

Little by little the cold numbed me, put me to sleep. The noise of the motor grew less and less, almost becoming a purr. It seemed to me that my blood had left my veins, without pain, without suffering. My eyelids grew heavier and heavier, seeming to want to close over my eyeballs, over my life.

“What do you think of her?”

“What?”

“This is no time for dozing. I’m asking you what you think of her.”

“No good, absolutely no good! Perfectly rotten night.”

“I’m not asking you about the night, but about Sophie.”

Chignole did not see the snow nor the dark, nor the death’s head livid and threatening which traced itself before me on the screen of the clouds each time our side lamps lighted the darkness. He could see only maddening hair, blue eyes, small hands, whose warmth he still retained. My companion was not cold.

It was not without difficulty that Monsieur Bassinet was persuaded to go down cellar.

“In the cellar? Surely you’re joking.”

At last he gave in to the pleadings of the guests and servants in the hotel, who called his attention to the fact that he ought to do it for the sake of his daughter.

At present, perched on a bottle rack with, at his feet, a traveller in the margarine business who was somewhat flabby, and on the other side a lady with flimsy underwear as her only attire, he continued his speech. “In

Paris when they came we were on the Boulevards, nose in the air and mouth wide open. It takes more than that to send us down with the wine casks."

"Eh, don't talk so much, Monsieur le Parisien, they might hear you and locate us," cut in the agent of margarine, not very much at his ease. "I am from Bordeaux, but I know enough to keep quiet when it is a necessity."

"Do you mean to say that you from the South have the pretension of teaching us Parisiens a lesson?"

"Doubtless! The Midi, the Midi. Humph, the Parisiens found it quite to their liking at the beginning of the war."

"Take that back or I'll make you swallow it!"

"Papa, papa," screamed Sophie.

"Achilles!" sobbed the flabby lady.

A terrific noise rent the air, sounds of broken glass, powder from plaster filled the air, heart-rending shrieks came from every direction.

"Help! help! a bomb!"

It was merely the rack of bottles which had given way under Monsieur Bassinet's weight.

Taking advantage of the general confusion, Sophie disappeared. Climbing up into a garret room, her elbows on the window sill,

she gazed anxiously in the direction of Malzeville.

Dawn was beginning to break. The plateau barred the horizon with its clear profile. In the East with the light, some avions were returning home, flying very low, their wings sparkling in the rosy hue of the sun. Were they all there? Had anything happened to him? In evoking the dangers passed her heart swelled to stifling. But look, instead of alighting one of the biplanes dived straight towards her house, towards her. Alive! He was alive! And the little Parisienne who for a long time had not communed with God, unconsciously crossed her hands, and her lips involuntarily and fervently recited a long forgotten prayer.

CHAPTER XVIII

CHIGNOLE GETS A BATH

“ I ONLY regret one thing, my children, and that is that Lolotte was not amongst us last night. She would have kicked up her heels with patriotic joy.”

We had returned from the bombardment of Metz just in time to extricate Monsieur Bassinet from the pile of trash under which he was buried in company of the gentleman from the Midi, now somewhat subsided thanks to the emotion, and the lady of the underclothes somewhat tortured by hysterics.

“ Ah, what did I tell you, Monsieur le Parisien ! It was indeed imprudent to talk so loud, a bomb did fall.”

“ That wasn't a bomb. You can see well enough that it was only the bottle rack which gave way under me. I weigh 218 pounds, Monsieur, two hundred and eighteen pounds ! ”

“ Mamma ! mamma ! ” bellowed the lady of the underclothes while biting the dust.

“ We'll give her back to you,” murmured

Chignole, who was clasping Sophie's small hands tightly in his own.

In the dining-room of the hotel Monsieur Bassinet treated us to a stimulant. He remained silent a moment, lost in profound reflection, and then uttered this decisive sentence: "Gentlemen, I permit myself to affirm without exaggeration that I have received the baptism of fire." And then in a lighter tone: "How about that little trip to Metz? Did it come off all right? Did you give her the gas?"

"It wasn't bad. A little cold."

"There's even a coal crisis in the sky, too."

"We're likely to have it warmer up there a little later on."

"Then you're not going to accompany us to the station. You're going to abandon us! Well, France first, naturally."

Sophie repressed a slight shiver. She looked at Chignole, she could see only him. It seemed as though she was trying to impress upon herself for ever the features of the one she loved. Her eyes would have so absorbed his image that in future she would have only to close them in order to see it.

"You're not a very curious lot, I must say. You have not wondered how Father Bassinet and his demoiselle succeeded in getting to

Nancy, the Army Zone, his passport and all the other necessary nonsense, all in order. It's quite a romance, isn't it, Sophie?"

He swallowed a mouthful of his coffee and rum, coughed, adjusted his hat, and throwing out his hands, as a prelude to his speech: "Naturally every one knows I'm only a coachman, but nevertheless one has one's acquaintances. In my time I have driven in my cab persons who to-day stand right on top. If my cushions could only speak! For instance, I was going to say something, but I guess I won't, I forgot Sophie was here. To return to my acquaintances, I happen to have as customer Senator Bichon (from the Rhone Inferieur), advocate of the law for the protection of girl mothers in Timbuctoo. Really quite a considerable personage. The other day I picked him up at the Place de la Concorde to take him to the Bois. While going around the lake, he elaborated the projects of his law which will presently fall——"

"Into the lake."

"Just what I say. But what can you expect? I was so distracted, doubtless thinking of you my aviators, of you my aces, that I started down the Rue de Rivoli and took my conscript father clear to the Bastille."

“He must have been pleased.”

“No, he said to me, ‘Bassinet, my friend Bassinet,’ he isn’t a bit haughty with me, ‘you had a genial idea in bringing me here. The Bastille, the birthplace of our Republic! The Bastille, cradle of humanity, the Bastille, origin of progress——’ ”

“Bastille! all out, end of the line,” concluded Chignole.

“To be brief, a whole lot of dope, and then said suddenly, ‘Well, friend Bassinet, why so distracted?’ In five seconds I told him of my desire to come and see you. Ah, my children! it didn’t take long. The next day I had the papers. The military men are not the only ones who are on to the system D.”

Broom! our machine received the pressure caused by an explosion just behind us.

“Tell me, ‘Old Charles,’ do you think she loves me?”

Broom! we re-entered the yellowish atmosphere of an explosion, this time in front of us.

“As for me, I love her very much. It keeps getting worse and worse.”

Broom! an explosion cut away one of our “piano strings,” and splintered the armour plate on the front of the cockpit.

"I think she's awfully good-looking. No one would ever take her for her father's daughter."

"We'll have to talk about that a little later, old man. For the moment, our personal danger is imminent."

"I am a fool. I suppose it is because I am in love."

We arrived at the Sablons station. Here the side tracks become more numerous, spreading out towards Metz.

"Mark the central point of the switches."

"Look! here come some Fokkers. They're just leaving their sheds before scattering."

"Let 'em come. Get your aim."

Chignole, his eyes on the sighting tube gave several brief indications. "Left! Right! Back up a little."

All at once, and only a few yards from us, I caught sight of a falling metallic-looking mass, followed rapidly by several others. I raised my head. A friend just above us was dropping his bombs without taking the precaution of looking to see whether there was anything in his road or not. I veered in diving, but we were obliged to cut through their line of fire.

"Wait till I get hold of those fellows at Mess."

"If their bomb had ever hit us, it was good night."

Chignole freed his bombs and took some photos. Our adversaries persisted their fire with precision, and we saw one of our friends fall.

"There goes another of ours."

"He's flying normally. Probably some splinters in his motor. He's not afire yet, thank God."

"Two less for cocktails this evening."

"As for me, I should rather be killed than taken prisoner."

"You're not thinking of Sophie when you say that."

"Fokker underneath at eight hundred yards."

"We'll be home long before he can overtake us."

"Knock on wood."

I had hardly finished ere our motor began to sputter.

"Do you hear that? You've brought us bad luck."

"You worry over nothing."

"Nothing? The darn thing has gone down two hundred revolutions. We're on the downward path. Just like you to brag at the wrong time."

We were above a forest, that it would be impossible to cross.

“A swell landing we'll make. Probably knock another 'Taxi' out of commission.”

“We're not obliged to land on the trees.”

“Where, then, might I ask? Have you got some patent perch up your sleeve?”

“No, but in your place, I would land in that pool. See, out there in the clearing. We stand less chance of being crushed.”

Beneath the sun the little pool lay like a jewel in its case of green vines.

“Do you take us for a sea-plane?”

At two yards above ground, I pulled on the lever. We lost speed and slid.

Plouff! The shock was more severe than we expected. For there wasn't more than six inches of water in the pool and we shot out of our plane like rockets.

We extracted ourselves as well as possible from the Marsh, covered with slime and completely drenched. We were shivering with cold, when a woman who was picking up wood, taking pity on us, approached and asked if we would care to follow her to her house. While her husband, a forest guard, ran to telephone to our squadron, we tried as best we could to dry ourselves in front of a brown porcelain

stove trimmed with brass bands. But we were obliged to give it up, our clothing was too wet. We were forced to undress, the woman lending me some of her husband's clothes, he being about my size. But as to Chignole, that was another question. They were far too large, so we were obliged to put him into a skirt and camisole which gave him a most ridiculous appearance.

Our auto came for us and we got in attired in costumes which were anything but banal. At the end of a few miles we were stopped on the road by a gendarme, or army policeman, who seeing us in such a get-up attempted to arrest us, and called out, "I find a woman in a military automobile. Your costume is not according to regulations. I shall draw up a report at once and send it to headquarters, stating that such conduct is both illegal and condemnable."

"But I am a man, Monsieur le gendarme. I have a moustache," shrieked Chignole.

"That does not suffice. It may be a trick. Perhaps you are spies. I shall take you to the guard house. The law is the law and must be obeyed."

"Corporal, you are right," affirmed Chignole solemnly. Then, jumping out and throwing

his arms around the neck of the astonished gendarme and imitating a female freak, gasped :

“ You won’t be hard on me, darling, will you ? ”

CHAPTER XIX

CHIGNOLE MAKES A MISTAKE

THE sheds are closed. Every two hours the mechanics climb up and sweep off the snow, whose weight might be too much for the canvas roofs. Our mess had taken on the appearance of a Swiss chalet, we were all seated around the oil stove in various and anything but becoming positions. Sirotin had prepared his hot draughts with particular attention.

“I wish to call attention, sirs, to the fact that if there is not enough sugar it is not my fault. It’s because of the crisis. I say this in order that you may not think I’m taking it on the quiet.”

It was a mournful afternoon, incredibly long; bad days for a squadron when unfavourable atmospheric conditions prevent all work. At times the silence was broken by a profound yawn, then it fell again, heavy, implacable, and seemed to thicken like the heavy white cloak that covered our barracks.

“ A queer Sunday.”

“ Why, yes, so it is Sunday. One no longer knows how one lives. If it hadn't been for Mass one would never have noticed it from any other day.”

Each Sunday at our request a vicar from one of the parishes in Nancy took the trouble of mounting to our plateau. Chignole immediately offered himself as organiser of the ceremony. The altar was always adorned with flowers, thanks to his ingenuity; the cruets were always filled, and the censer in working order. He had even learned the responses with prodigious facility, and he went through the service as though he had been an altar boy all his life.

“ I can remember Latin like a streak now, ‘ Old Charles.’ ”

“ I suppose that's because you don't understand a word you are saying.”

“ There's no getting round it, it certainly is a swell language. Sort of sing-song like a piece of music. Who on earth would ever have dreamed that yours truly would ever be on such good terms with a priest ? How surprised God must be ! When with His long telescope He looks down and sees me reply to all the Amens, and the ‘ Spiritu Tuos,’ He must

say, 'Chignole, Chignole, why I thought he was brought up in a freethinkers' school. We must reward him. I want him to have a Boche. Take note, St. Peter, one Boche for Chignole.' "

And to cap the climax to-day, accompanied by a mechanician who is quite a virtuoso on the violin, Chignole sang an "O Salutaris" with taste and in tune.

"Has some one congratulated Chignole?"

"He's a revelation."

"Tenor of aces; the ace of tenors."

"I gave her the gas that time, all right."

"We'll see that you're honourably discharged from the army so that you can hold forth in the Sistine Chapel."

Chignole, his eyes cast downward, his nose in a vertical position, his cigarette hanging from his mouth, didn't seem to be in a good humour.

"What's the trouble? Are you bored?"

"No."

"Well, you don't look as though you were having a hilarious time."

". . ."

"Are your snails troubling you?"

"My snails are like me, they're sick of work. Their feet are tied and so are mine."

He heaved a long, low sigh, stretched himself, and then grew confidential.

“I’ve had enough of aviation. The captain has again refused me a pilot’s commission.”

“That’s nice of you. So you want to drop me.”

“Listen, ‘Old Charles,’ follow me carefully. Observer is all very well, but after all, one plays nothing but second fiddle. I’ve had enough of the game as bomb thrower. This is the third request that has been refused, so——”

In my heart I knew my companion was right, no matter what my regret at our separation. Often in the air I had made him take my seat and given him the first ideas about running an aeroplane. To me he appeared gifted. Moreover, his numerous hours of flight have given him a practice that is preferable to all school theories. He could easily become an excellent pilot and I understood his bitterness.

“So our friend wishes to feel the wheel. Nothing less than a scout plane for him. Gentlemen, our friend Chignole has visions of a baby Nieuport or a Spad,” joked C., who puts on a fez as head ornament on bad days. He affirms that this accessory revives for him pleasant memories of the Orient, the sun, of blue sea, and pointed minarets.

"No need of being so haughty, gentlemen, piloting isn't so difficult as all that."

This animated dialogue somewhat shook us from our torpor, but gradually it settled down upon us anew, and Chignole added: "Oh! after all, I don't care a hang"—this phrase seeming satisfactory to all because it stopped the discussion.

The secretary entered.

"The captain has just telephoned. Free quarters because of the weather. You can all go to Nancy if you like."

Our ennui disappeared instantly. Faces unbent and every one shrieked with delight.

"Nothing the matter with the captain. He's all right. Where shall we go? To the Movies. Hurry up. Not the blunderbuss, the light car."

We piled into the motors.

"Any one missing?"

"Yes, Chignole."

"Hurry up there! What are you waiting for? The end of the war?"

"No. I'm not feeling up to snuff. Go without me, I am going to turn in."

At the Moving Picture Palace we witnessed the penultimate episode of "The Masque with the White Teeth." We relaxed in follow-

ing the exciting scenario which unfolded itself upon the screen. Moreover, Rexgadin pleased us beyond measure. Max was more than interesting, and the two-step played by the orchestra carried our childish joy to a maximum.

Bssi !—Bssi !—Poum ! a signal fuse. Some joke. A Boche in sight with all that snow. Some one trying to mystify us.

Bssi !—Bssi !—Poum ! The Boches had passed our lines. This was still more unlikely. Nevertheless, we rushed towards the exit. Everybody had his nose in the air looking at the sky. The snow had ceased. A few flakes were still dancing, delayed like white petals in the warm air.

We could not see the enemy, but we could hear our anti-aircraft guns.

“To the plateau ! Quick !”

The captain who had joined us took the wheel of the first car himself.

We crossed the city at breakneck speed. The inhabitants who prudently got out of our way gazed at us a little anxiously, but full of confidence. They know us. They know our raids and also our losses. The women looked at us, each glance full of admiration and pity. Some threw violets at us and their lips were

extended, trembling a little as though for an ultimate caress.

Throughout the centuries it is ever the same repetition of legendary gestures, the kiss of a Roman Empress to a dying gladiator, the smile of a chatelaine to the winner of a tournament, the glance of Carmen to a Toreador before his entrance into the ring. At that moment each one of us felt rising within him all the combative past of unknown ancestors. The Knight and the Crusaders, "God, the King, and the Ladies." War in laces, garland-draped drums. All the useless delightful impromptu sentiments known as "Panache."

"There's nothing left to do but die after a send-off like that," murmured L., called "Barb Wire," wiping a tear from his eye with a bouquet he had caught on the wing.

We arrived at the Squadron, and imagine our astonishment at seeing one of our machines already in pursuit of the Boche. The mechanicians, embarrassed, explained sheepishly. "When Chignole heard the signal he forced us to take out the plane. We didn't want to, but you know how he is. He cranked it himself, and lifted fine."

Pale, excited, we followed his evolutions. He climbed with so much resolution towards

the Boches that the latter made a sudden turn and fled towards the frontier. Presently our comrade descended slowly without hastening. Unconsciously, perhaps, he sketched the movements of what we call in aviation terms "the dead leaf." And then at last he alighted, a little brusquely, perhaps, but without breaking a single wire. Jumping lightly from the cockpit he approached us. The captain stepped forward biting his moustache.

"Chignole, my boy, it was mad of you! Crazy! Idiotic! Chic! wonderful! I am going to ask the Military Medal for you."

He stopped a moment, hesitated, and then deciding: "But for act of serious indiscipline—I am obliged—to ask for your transference into the infantry."

He stopped again, then grasping Chignole in his arms: "Pardon me, my boy, oh! pardon me. But understand that I just can't do otherwise!"

CHAPTER XX

CHIGNOLE LEAVES US

“WHY do you insist, my friend? Do you hope to win me over? Do you think it was an easy thing for me to make up my mind to ask that Chignole be decorated for bravery and then dismiss him from the squad, have him transferred into the infantry?”

“But, sir, if there was a fault surely he has paid for it.”

“I am going to reward his deed of courage, but I must punish his indiscipline.”

“Always discipline!”

“Stop! You are going to say something foolish! I can guess your reasoning. ‘Discipline has nothing to do with this case,’ you say. But you are wrong there. If I were to shut my eyes to the heavy fault of your friend, what in future would be my situation as chief, responsible for this squad? To-morrow the first upstart mechanic possessing the fearlessness of Chignole but minus his skill would want to recommence this same folly. Only

he would doubtless break the machine and injure himself into the bargain. Then, where would my authority be? No, no, in aviation, as in all other arms, discipline is necessary. It may be more gentle, more paternal, for after all we are grouped together as in small families. One can be indulgent but one must be firm, just like a father, and this is such a case."

"Punish him, sir, certainly, but less severely."

"This is not a time to bicker over how many days' punishment more or less your friend ought to receive. This is a case of principle demanding punishment of principle. All or nothing! More than that the situation is aggravated on account of the publicity it may and has no doubt already caused. By to-morrow the incident will be noised all over town. People will talk of heroism, then add things: inexactitudes, deformations. I don't need to tell you how every little thing concerning the aviation corps is caught up and made public; is amplified or diminished, cooked up, so to speak by the talebearer, who is more or less well informed on the subject, more or less disposed in our favour. What stupid things haven't been said about some of our aces! Under pretext of praise what hasn't been attri-

buted to them ? Often things that are harmful to their careers and the careers of their intimate friends. Oh ! I beg of you not to insist. My mind is made up. My decision is irrevocable."

"Very well, sir."

I saluted and turned on my heel to go.

"Wait !"

I remained motionless, leaning toward the door I was about to open. The captain sat thoughtful a moment. A cloud seemed to pass across his brow. His voice lowered, became less gruff, almost soft, inaudible.

"Men ! men !" he said. "I hope you may never be obliged to command them. Stripes on your sleeve ? How heavy they weigh sometimes. Just put yourself in my position. At this moment I am certain of consciously accomplishing my duty. Well, if ever anything happens to that boy out there where I am sending him, I should never console myself."

I had entered my superior's tent feeling haughty and disdainful. On the tip of my tongue were words that would have hurt. I came out of that tent a little ashamed of the lesson I had received : a simple, noble lesson from a real man and a true soldier.

The farewell luncheon. Chignole was to

take the afternoon train and rejoin his infantry depot. We were all in the dumps, but of course we did not wish to show it. Our comrade facilitated our task by joking about his new position.

"In the infantry—how about it, 'Old Charles' ? Didn't I tell you we were destined to see everything in this war ? "

"Everything except peace."

"Left, right, left, right ! Our ace will be a peach with his kit on his back."

Sirotin circulated about the table, his step strangely resembling that of the "valse chauloupée." As a preventive measure against the emotion of parting he thought it wise to sample a few of our bottles.

"How are the cocktails ? "

"Just right."

"Quite hip-hip ! "

"As for me, I should have preferred a little more garlic . . . just a speck . . . a suspicion."

Chignole was anxious to give us a last demonstration of his friendship ; he delivered his faithful snails to the cook, thereby sacrificing his whole racing stable.

"I recognise that one. He's "Gue du Roy," the pig ! He cost me every cent I had. And there is Sardanapale. Who would have

thought that his was such a short-lived career. He certainly was promising. It will be some time before you will see a snail with such a reach as his."

"Now look here, Chignole, you should worry! We are going to look up our acquaintances, and we will oblige them to change the entire cabinet if we don't get what we want. You won't be in the trenches long."

And C. gave a violent stroke on the table which for the moment he took for the Tribune of the Chamber.

"I should worry! The infantry? What of it? Can't I break my neck out there just as well as here? A little less elegantly, perhaps, but then! You mustn't be too particular at such times as these. Besides, I am carrying away a wonderful remembrance of you all—the 'bananna'" (the military medal).

And his eyes rested proudly on the handsome enamelled medal that hung from its yellow and green ribbon against his heaving breast.

"And out there you will win the Legion of Honour, old chap. We feel sure of it. Then you will have the whole shooting match."

Poum! Sirotin sent the first cork from the champagne bottles toward the ceiling.

A carriage came and took away his luggage. It was understood that he would go alone and on foot. He distrusted the adieux on the platform of the station, and so did we.

His good-bye speech to the boys was kind and touching, and it would have caused tears from them if they had not sworn to be strong.

Then we found ourselves alone together beneath the shed. Chignole roved around the machine, passing his hand over it, touching the cables, caressing it as if it were a girl.

"You will watch over it, old fellow, won't you? It's going to annoy you a little at first, I know, for you like to keep your hands white. Remember, you haven't got Chignole to shake up the mechanics. Above all, before starting always close the faucets of the hand pumps carefully. I repeat this to you because I know you are absent-minded, and you might get burned."

Then we crossed the plateau. How many memories it must have evoked from my companion. His arrival from Paris, bold but timid, watching the pilots enviously. His violent desire to become like them; his first awakening of horror before the sudden death of a comrade who a few moments before was full of life, and then was picked up in pieces in

a rick cloth. Then the times he accompanied me as an observer . . . our raids, our adventures, our misfortunes, the good times at the mess . . . and even that drunkard Sirotin, who a few minutes ago was sobbing over his brandy, his face quite black, from having wiped his eyes with his apron.

“ Since we are alone I can now admit that I feel cursed bad at having to leave. But above all, I don’t want you to think that I fear going into the infantry, or that I regret leaving our comforts. Well, what can you expect, it may be stupid of me, but from having come in contact with you I have grown ambitious. Yes, really ! What did I know about life ? Nothing. A child of Montmartre, then a workman, my most cherished desires were realised in a bicycle or motor-cycle ride of a Sunday, a little dinner at Nogent, I limited myself to that. Now I have frequented, lived intimately with comrades of a condition superior to mine, I admit it, I suffer from it. I am going to suffer at the come-down. The infantry is the mass, the number. I shall be a number, a nonentity. Here I was beginning to be some one. I feel many things awakening in me. I have been turning over the pages of my life like a picture book. And it is hard to close

the book without going to the end, without ever knowing the end of the story."

I tried to stop his increasing emotion.

"You are going to pass through Paris, you will see your mother and Sophie again."

"Do you think I'd go and see them? Cast out from the aviation, why I'd never dare to. How could I explain to them? They would think me a failure."

We had reached the extremity of the plateau. He looked at the sheds, the barracks, a bi-plane which was rising above them. He heard the stroke of the hammers, the grinding of the files, the laughter of the mechanics at work. He inhaled the odour peculiar to oil and gasolene, mixed with that of the earth, of the trees, of the wind. The sun had disappeared and the then crescent moon appeared very clearly in the sky which was still light.

"There will be raids to-night."

"Yes, Chignole."

"With whom will you go?"

"I don't know."

Little by little the lights in Nancy made their appearance. Behind each one it seemed as though a soul trembled.

“ I am off ! I might miss my train. Adieu, ‘Old Charles.’ ”

Without turning around he dashed down the narrow path leading toward the foot of the hill. I remained a long time watching his silhouette grow smaller and smaller, then vanish in the blueness of the night.

CHAPTER XXI

CHIGNOLE WRITES TO OLD CHARLES

“ I AM taking advantage of a halt, Old Charles, to chat a while with you. Imagine a stony country that would be no good for aviation. It is surrounded by low forests except on one side where a high open quarry makes a terrace over the valley, like the terrace at St. Germain. From the corner one discovers a rather pretty view; fields of brown earth, streaked here and there with furrows. A farm with its white dovecot, a church whose belfry leans over a trifle, and numerous badly built hay-stacks. All this in the early light seems small, simplified, looks just like the toys made by André Helle, that you once showed me in a catalogue of Christmas gifts.

No need of telling you I have left off my fancy uniform for a top coat which is too short and trousers much too long, while waiting for my war collection. Only I sewed the wings on my sleeves. The fellows here made fun of me but I couldn't help it.

A word about my new companions. They are wounded soldiers now recuperated and some kids are of the same class as mine. I am employing myself in influencing them. Since we must live together it is better that they should take my habits than I theirs.

They are good fellows but not very clever. We are cantoned in a village a few kilometres from Dreux. The quarters occupied by my squad is a barn. Straw is very warm, I never on earth would have thought so. How much I have learned about things in a short time. It pays to travel.

The captain is a retired officer who has resumed service for the duration of the war. We have baptised him "Dudule." A real joy! He can't talk without clearing his throat: "Cra-cra." Yesterday at the Assembly he came out with a speech. I leave it to you for rhetoric. "My children . . . cra-cra . . . take example from your elders, cra-cra . . . they have conducted themselves well . . . cra-cra . . . all dead . . . cra-cra. . . . You will do as they did . . . cra-cra . . . follow their example."

Nothing unforeseen ever happens here. In the morning exercise. The afternoon marches or shooting; five to seven, liberty. The only distraction is the tobacco stand kept by

Mother Sausage, so-called because you can buy them at the same time as tobacco.

You wouldn't believe me if I were to tell you I hadn't yet gotten into trouble, so here goes.

When we wake up in the morning the cold nips, and, our lodging being far from the kitchen, the hat juice is cold when it arrives. Now our loft is contingent to a barn wherein ruminates a Breton cow. I also have ruminated—an idea—and each morning I milked the cow. The first few times she kicked like thunder. I thought that one time she meditated bunting me, but finally I caught on to the game. Now I do it with my thumb and forefinger like a professional.

Can you just see the expression of the peasant who can't understand why his cow has gone dry? Veterinary . . . medicine, nothing availed. But one fine morning the old fellow hid himself, and what didn't I get. It would make a long story. Dudule, of course, was informed and his cra-cra-cra-cra's . . . haven't ceased since.

As for me, I said that it was the cow who first came to get me because her milk weighed too heavy. Dudule recognised patriotic sentiment in her for first having addressed herself

to a soldier. Reports on reports followed each other in rapid succession, and it all ended by the purchase of the animal from our mess purse.

You see I am guided by reason. I have taken my transference to the Infantry in the right way. Naturally I am to be in the first departure for the front. It didn't look encouraging at the outset on account of the confounded rule that demands a residence of three months in a barracks before going to the front. So I went to Dudule about it.

"Captain, if you don't send me to the trenches I won't be responsible for what happens !"

He feared new complications ; gave his consent and then asked :

" You say you come from the Aviation Corps ? You mean a lunatic asylum ! Cra-cra cra-cra. Are they all as crazy as you in the aviation ? "

" All of them, sir ! It's the style."

Thanks awfully for the books you sent me. I have just finished the " Three Musketeers." Some fellows ! We're a bit like them ourselves, only on a smaller scale, of course ! But the same class. If ever I lived a life before this one, I bet I was a soldier with high boots and slouched hat and a trailing plume.

I am going to astonish you. I like to read now ; yes, I who formerly couldn't remain quiet, now sit without difficulty for hours at a time before my book. But the more I learn the more discouraged I become when I realise how little I know, all that I shall never be able to learn.

Although only two hours from Paris I've not been near it. I swore I wouldn't write them anything ; above all, don't give them my address. Make up anything you like about me, but don't tell them where I am. No, I don't want to return before having accomplished on the firing line something that will make my departure from the squad forgotten.

It is hard all the same. When I think of Sophie, of Mother so near me I suddenly have a mad desire to jump on the first train and throw myself in their arms. I still feel the soft warmth of Mother's neck when I used to hide my face there. Fifi's eyes still pursue me to such an extent that often I see them in the sky, in a bush, in the deep water of our well. But my great sorrow is to have left you. With all my force I try not to remember any longer. One minute I think I have succeeded after giving myself up to some eccentricities but I always slump back again

into my grief. I am like those fallen angels with broken wings—wings. . . . Our white wings which bore us so well in the light or shadow, for fun or for battle.

I can see you, you are on the ground, you raise your head.

“There’s a little wind, but it’s turning to the north. Bring out the cuckoo.”

You put on your gloves, you turn down your cap, you relight your everlasting cigarette, taking plenty of time so that the mere soldiers on guard may have the leisure of admiring you at their ease, for you are something of a poseur, Old Charles.

All this is a little of what your Chignole will never be able to forget, old fellow, boss, if you like, my big indulgent brother whom I love.

The night was inky black. So much so that I lighted the lamps at the wing tips to assure myself of the position of our machine. The enemy’s fire redoubled in intensity. I put them out. Little by little the firing ceased, then stopped altogether.

Then came the blind, interminable rush; the motor roared, from each valve leapt a bluish aigrette of light.

I had become a part of the machine to such a degree that I was insensible to the grip of the frost. It seemed to me that the hand marking the revolutions countermarks my own pulsations.

I turned around ; behind me I could just catch a glimpse of a dark form. My observer, enveloped in his cap and leather, might have been Chignole. I thought of the fate that awaited this new companion, third to occupy the place.

First there was V. ; killed while learning to pilot a machine. In invoking his image, the faces of all my dear departed friends lost in the war crowded upon my memory, and I was ashamed of still being alive. But as in dying each one of you took a little of me, a little of what I had given you of affection, of tenderness, O my comrades, do not envy me for living, do not reproach me for having remained.

Still living, however, Chignole is one of you, since he is dead for me. Of all the separations ours was the most cruel.

He was the Benjamin, the enfant terrible, the baby of the little squadron, and I wonder if we accomplished toward him our entire duty. Did he always receive from us the example

which as his elders we owed him, owed him as his superiors in the social scale ?

I was angry at myself for having become attached to him, for not having the heart of a true soldier, made of steel, a heart that stamps out a friendship, a heart that love cannot touch.

How true is that thought of St. Augustin :
“ What folly not to know how to limit one’s self to loving men except as one should love that which is apt to death.”

Our bi-plane tipped backward in a sudden eddy.

“ Light the lanterns, quick ! ”

Mechanically I obeyed. A great shadow cut our passage a few yards ahead of us. It was a comrade whom we had almost encountered.

CHAPTER XXII

CHIGNOLE IN THE FIRING LINE

“A BOCHE signalled! Flatten out! Carry on!”

The sentence ran monotonously, transmitted from mouth to mouth.

They stopped digging, threw aside their spades and crowded into the dugouts.

“Who is the idiot perched on the parapet ladder?”

“Chignole, of course.”

“He’ll get us all shot!”

Chignole, nose in the air, jaws contracted, contemplated the bird with the black crosses which was flying low over the trenches.

“Are you going to let him off without a fight? Where are our Nieuports? And our Spads? Talk about cheek.”

Chignole was at the front since the day before. Much had happened in less than a week.

The despatch asking for reinforcements arrived at the depot. A shiver up the spine told him he was really going to the front. A new

uniform, shiny straps, glistening mess tins, the gun, the bayonet. Preparation under the gaze of former soldiers inapt and wounded, employed now as instructors.

“Don’t throw away your reserve rations, do you hear me? When you’ve nothing to eat you will be glad enough to have them. Have you all a little brandy? Don’t forget the twine.”

Adieux to Mother Sausage who offered the barkeeper’s treat. The review on the platform; Dudule entangled his legs in his long sword. Emotion exaggerated his cra-cra. . . . Then all pile into the cars, each one overloaded with packages. The Marseillaise; stops in the stations; the station at Noisy-le-Sec. In the distance the Eiffel Tower and the Sacré Cœur against a sky strangely calm, peaceful and mild. A gate alone separated the avenue from the detained convoy; a tramway passed going directly into the heart of Paris. Ah! the strolls in the Rue Lepic, mounting toward “La Gallette.” The summer nights when the heat from the city rises, envelops and intoxicates you a little with its heavy perfumes. Then the train glided into the night. The boys fell asleep, literally snoring over their last cups of “pinard”; the light on the ceiling made grimacing

shadows. Hour followed hour. Then a distant rumbling, a dull pounding. The big guns!

“Carry on! Attack at twelve-fifteen.”

The section chiefs, the corporals present themselves.

“All water bottles filled! Prepare the masks; two men from each squadron for the grenades.”

Chignole was seated in his “Cagna” patiently waiting, his gun between his legs.

This was his first assault. He was neither fearful nor courageous; no enthusiasm, simply the sentiment of a great duty to be accomplished.

This was no longer aviation with the attraction of individual exploit. From henceforward, son of that earth now torn by the enemies’ shells, he was going to struggle to snatch it from the ravisher. Immersed in it up to his ankles he was as the glorious galley slave riveted to his martyrdom.

Never had the idea of country surged in his simple brain, unfit for abstractions, and now it rose, hiding the mud and the slime beneath its tricolour cloak. France was there before him. She beckoned.

“Come on, little fellow! You will be brave

because I am going to march in front of you. Take my hand ! It may seem feverish, but its warmth will recall that of other cherished hands. Look into my eyes. You recognise them, don't you ? They are your mother's, those of all mothers, almost blind from weeping ; and since you might die, come, gather from my lips, dried by the wind of battle, come gather the kiss of the one you love."

"Grenadiers to the parapets ! Bayonets fixed ! "

Through friends on the Staff I had learned where Chignole's regiment was located, about sixty kilometres from Nancy. I obtained permission from the Captain to stop off at his rest station, on returning from one of my raids. I had just abandoned a group of comrades, much to the delight of a Fokker who, believing me in difficulties with my motor, hastened toward my downward path. Fortunately our lines were there. I was surprised at the activity which reigned along them, to see the smoke curling up from the ground.

"Can you see the village ? "

"I can see *a* village. There is a belfry on the map and I can't find it."

"That's because it's on the ground."

A bombarded village ; tiny lights burning

in the houses which, deprived of their roofs, looked like so many boxes without covers. We descended gradually, searching carefully for a landing.

“Be careful of shell holes.”

“Don’t worry. We’ll land over there, out of reach of the guns.”

A vast field bordered by trees which would conceal the machine from the piercing view of the observation balloons.

“Look carefully ; see those heaps ? ”

I indicated numerous grey mounds just below us.

“Rubbish heaps, most likely.”

At thirty yards I cut and dived.

“Come about quick ! ”

The mounds were nothing less than sheep lying on the ground and which the noise of our motor scared so that they scampered in all directions.

I did not even try to lift the machine for I knew we should not be able to cross the curtain of trees. One wheel caught in a sheep and killed it, but our speed being reduced no further damage was done.

“We’ll have lamb for dinner to-night.”

While my observer took care of the bi-plane I jumped into a supply wagon.

“ You’ll get your information at the Town Hall in the village. The soup kitchens are there.”

The Town Hall was partly destroyed. Explosions of shells had demolished the façade and, as though through irony, had left only the word “ Fraternity ” of the three which are usually engraved on the front of all public buildings.

“ They are even firing on our kitchen,” clamoured the cook, tranquilly stirring his stew with a gigantic ladle.

“ You are looking for Chignole, the Aviator ? I saw him this morning at breakfast. But he went back again. It’s their turn to attack at noon. I advise you to wait here. Do you want a bite ? ”

“ Is the first line far from here ? ”

“ About five kilometres. If you want to get there take the path which begins at the church. They will probably stop you before you get far. For heaven’s sake, don’t tell them who it was that gave you the tip.”

The broken stained-glass windows were like so many precious stones glistening in the sunlight. The church steeple had crushed the altar in its fall. The door of the tabernacle hung on one hinge. An image of Christ held in



In the sky a great white bird hovered

one hand a broken cross ; it seemed almost like a living being. I passed in front of an armoured pill-box from which protruded a 75-mm. I crossed stretcher-bearers whose litters covered with sheets were bearing wounded uttering cries of distress. The noise grew more distinct. Above me it was the continual groaning, but in a different key according to the nature of the projectile and the length of its flight.

Alive, should I find him alive ? I ran on, stumbling in my haste. I threw aside my helmet, my temples were throbbing. It seemed to me I should never get there.

From lateral passages poured out long files of men. They were impassive, mounted slowly and stumbled into a wider trench where the " Poste de Secours " were installed. I questioned a little surgeon.

" Little aviator who was recently sent to us ? He is attacking at this moment. Useless to go further, you could not pass. You were lucky to get this far. Come into my place. No use being killed. You will have news of him from the despatch bearers."

A smoky lamp hung from the vault which was made of rails intercrossed with beams. On an enamelled table glistened the surgical instruments. In one corner discarded ban-

dages, bloody cotton; in the other shoes, arms, torn greatcoats that bore great brown spots. Everything reeked with moisture, iodoform, sweat.

The door opened. All noise from without penetrated into that cellar. A man whose face was bleeding was led in. They stretched him out on the floor. The doctor turned an electric lamp on him.

"It's nothing. Just some sand which the shell in bursting showered on you."

"Yes, but my eyes, I can't see."

"I tell you that it's nothing. Come downstairs into the ambulance. Hurry up there, old fellow, you must make room for the others." And he patted him gently on the shoulder.

"But it seems to me I recognise you. You belong to the Twelfth. Have you got a fellow there called Chignole?"

I tried to guess the answer of that spectre whose mutilated head was bleeding copiously.

"Chignole? He might better have remained in the aviation, because he——"

"He fell?"

"I think he is done for. Oh, my eyes, my eyes! Are you quite sure I shall see again, Doctor? I am not blind?"

Chignole was buried up to his waist. He had just awakened. It was the end of the day. He felt no pain but he was very weak.

"Die? It can't be possible. No. I am only twenty years old. Only twenty and yet——"

He raised his eyes to implore for pity. In the sky a great white bird which he recognised hovered, lighted by the last rays of the sinking sun. Was he dreaming? Was it the fever? No, it couldn't be he? Yet there was his sign, the black star on the cockpit. Then it was really "Old Charles"!

The noise below redoubled. Turning about towards the guns, he yelled, "For God's sake, shut up!"

Then with infinite resignation made from the sacrifice of his whole being, accepted, blessed, he offered it to those far-away wings and gently sank back into oblivion.

But before embracing for ever the cold frozen ground a refrain of a café concert rose to the lips of the Parisien urchin and, as death crept over him, he was singing:

"Bonsoir . . . M'sieurs . . . dames! . . ."

CHAPTER XXIII

CHIGNOLE IS NO LONGER CHIGNOLE

MY DEAR ARTHUR—

Yes, it is I, Sophie, who is writing you. Do not be angry. You did not want us to know that you were in the Infantry. You invented a story with your boss. You sent him your letters which he forwarded to us, stamped from the squad. But your Old Charles does not lie skilfully. When you were wounded he confessed all to us.

Papa fell into a wild fury. "If he is dead I shall never forgive him."

What could have become of you? I hunted the war offices from the Boulevard St. Germain to the Ecole Militaire, passing by the Invalides. Mamma, who accompanied me, lost all patience. She scolded the "Auxiliares," she was suffocated with rage because they did not know you. Can you imagine such a thing? Her future son-in-law and they didn't know him? I assure you she advertised you.

At last by dint of boring the offices, we learned of your evacuation, first to a hospital in the army's zone and now at Cannes. Splendid! Our Chignole is a person in high society, spending his winter on the Riviera.

And, since you are better, I have just got to scold you, for I am writing for everybody. Why have you deprived us of news for more than a month now? Think of what we have endured. Evenings here in the house your mother and mine and I looked at each other without saying a word, and then would weep. Bad boy! Yes, weep.

"I have had enough of seeing you sniffing! You are no longer women, you are watering-pots. I have had enough of it. I am going out to take a ride with Lolotte." And Papa would depart to hide his grief.

Why not have let us know about your troubles? I am no longer your Sophie if you do not want to share your sorrows with me. Do you think I loved you just because you were an aviator? Stupid boy! We have loved each other for a long time, a long time before the war!

Nevertheless, I forgive you. Yes, I am proud to think that it was for me, to please me that you wanted to be an ace. That will hap-

pen later when you are cured and ready to go at it again. But before then, you must have a long convalescence, so I am going to tell you something. Keep it to yourself, don't tell any one. It was to be a surprise for you on your arrival. Mother didn't want us to get married before the end of the war, but Father assumed his special occasion air and declared : " Madame Bassinet, peace is not for to-day. It would not be human to expect those children to wait. If you had been obliged to languish as they have, you would have thought it mean, Madame Bassinet ! "

She did not reply, but the next day we went and bought a piece of longcloth and began my trousseau. Your mother helps us after she has finished her housework. She has given up the workroom because it tires her too much. She is embroidering initials, such adorable ones.

The tenants ask about you. Old Father Fondu, the city employé, the one who lets his little finger-nail grow, has read your official citation in the papers. Papa has placed it at the head of his bed under your photograph with a bit of blessed palm.

" Because if it doesn't do any good, it can't do any harm," he says.

That is all the news there is, my dear Arthur ! But something that is not new to you is that I love you very much, very much—no joking, and I want you to feel sure of it.

Many, many kisses from one who will soon be your wife.

YOUR SOPHIE BASSINET.

I reopened my letter to tell you to be good and take care of yourself.

Squad V. B.

MON PETIT FRÈRE—

C., who knows an officer in the hospital service, has just received a despatch giving your address.

So you bear me a grudge for having told the truth to the Bassinets, and you decided to leave your old boss without a word of news. Can you already have forgotten him ? Even if it were true I would consider you just the same and always as my little brother of the Aviation, but I would be very sad about it. We have lived together through terrible hours, splendid in their misery. At the Holy Table of war, we have communed with the same Hosts. I cannot think of my aerial campaign without your likeness starting up. It is the water mark of each page of my memories.

Everybody here is asking about you, including the Captain. Don't worry. You will be reinstated. Everything is going to be all right.

Regain your strength rapidly, under the blossoming mimosas. Lucky dog! Come back with your good humour, your jokes, your tricks and the gold ring of a happy marriage. You see I am in the secret, as best man.

I embrace you, my dear little brother,

OLD CHARLES.

Chignole had left his hospital, that sumptuous palace on the edge of the beach. He had crossed old Cannes and by the rue des Suisses had reached the path which leads to the Croix des Gardes. There propped against the twisted trunk of an olive tree, he again read his letters, but soon his eyes no longer follow the text, gazing wistfully into space.

The sun was setting behind the Maures, and the rocks dip into the sea of deep violet where the Lerins stand out like two black spots. The light on the mole is lighted, and the bend in the bay loses itself in the greyness of the rising fog. Each villa, suspended on the side of the mountain like a white cage, was swallowed up by the shadow, absorbed as it were by its garden.

A bell sounded faintly as though pulled by childish hands.

It was no longer the steadfast twinkling of the stars in a cold grey sky that makes them appear so strangely near. They are far away in this air which is only ruffled by perfumes.

Chignole was unhappy. Chignole was no longer the impulsive Chignole, the whimsical boy of unpremeditated acts. Had the shock received awakened sleeping elements in his brain? Did the virgin blood which replaces that lost by his wound act differently on his heart? He was a very different man who began to feel, to understand, and this first emotion was cruel.

A year of the squad, the permanent contact with comrades of different social standing than his own, had given him insight into a new life of higher ideals, higher ambitions, more delicate pleasures.

The mildness of this climate, its colour, its songs, its odours, peppered with carnations and sweetened with hyacinths, made Paris seem sad to him and the house on the rue des Saules narrow and sombre. The small Mediterranean ports, flooded with light, awakened in him ideas of departure for enchanted lands, and the

factory which devoured his youth seemed monstrous and ominous with its black tufted chimneys.

His nurses, whom he felt were women of birth and refinement beneath their linen blouses, the music of their voices, the velvety eyes of a flower girl at the market in Nice, lessened the image of Sophie, the little stenographer, too pale, too blonde.

He foresaw a tormented future, full of struggle, of bitterness and disillusion. He would never suffer and cause suffering. Why did he not die when he believed indeed that he was going to, his body already prisoner of the earth, his thoughts in the sky, under the protection of "Old Charles," who came as his guardian angel to assist his hesitating soul at the moment of the Great Journey.

And because death haunted him he thought of his mother.

"My little one. . . . Have I not already wept enough in this life for others and for you? I am your old mother who needs your caresses. You came to me so late in life that I love you as a grandson. As long as I remain for you I shall be the same. Of all that surrounds you I alone shall not change, invariable, faithful, indulgent, passive. My

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eyelids shall only be properly closed by your fingers, my beloved. You must live, my dear one, you must come back."

From the barracks in the distance a bugle sound taps.

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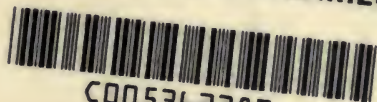
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